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Interzone

**IMAGINATIVE FICTION: KEITH ROBERTS,
CHERRY WILDER & OTHERS
RADICAL ARCHITECTURE: ROGER DEAN**



Interzone

No 6 Winter 1983/84

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EDITORIAL

In April 1983 we sent all our charter subscribers a small questionnaire along with the usual invitation to resubscribe to Interzone. By the end of August over 180 people had answered the questions in full or in part. This is a response rate of almost 25% — a good result, we feel. What follows is a summary of your opinions.

We asked which of the 20 stories in our first four issues you particularly liked, and which (if any) you disliked. By subtracting all the negative mentions from all the positive ones we arrived at the following story ratings. The works are listed in descending order of popularity with the final score for each given in brackets:

1. "Kitemaster" by Keith Roberts (52)
2. "Memories of the Space Age" by J.G. Ballard (47)
3. "The Dissemblers" by Garry Kilworth (33)
4. "Calling All Gumdrops!" by John Sladek (28)
5. "After-Images" by Malcolm Edwards (23)
6. "The New Rays" by M. John Harrison (16)
7. "The Third Test" by Andrew Weiner (14)
8. "The Ur-Plant" by Barrington Bayley (13)
9. "Seasons Out of Time" by Alex Stewart (12)
10. "Angel Baby" by Rachel Pollack (11)
11. "No Coward Soul" by Josephine Saxton (10)
12. "The Caulder Requiem" by Alex Stewart (10)
13. "Guesting" by John Sladek (7)
14. "The Quiet King of the Green South West" by Andy Soutter (6)
15. "Cheek to Cheek" by Nicholas Allan (4)
16. "The Cabinet of Edgar Allan Poe" by Angela Carter (4)
17. "On the Deck of the Flying Bomb" by David Redd (2)
18. "Saving the Universe" by David Garnett (0)
19. "Overture to a Midsummer Night's Dream" by Angela Carter (-9)
20. "The Brothel in Rosenstrasse" by Michael Moorcock (-26)

While a popularity poll such as this can provide no arbitration on literary merit, we felt that our readers would be interested in seeing the above results (our writers should be interested too!). Since Keith Roberts' "Kitemaster" was the clear leader of the field we are happy to be able to present you with its sequel, "Kitecadet", in this issue of Interzone. We hope to have more from J.G. Ballard, Garry Kilworth and John Sladek in the not-too-distant future. However, we were particularly pleased that first stories such as Malcolm Edwards' "After-Images" and Alex Stewart's "Seasons Out of Time" were well received, and we shall continue to put a high priority on publishing the work of new writers.

We introduced illustrations with our third issue. We are gratified that no less than 70 people thought the pictures in issues 3 and 4 were generally good (for the record, 11 thought they were "bad"). The work of Ian Miller and Iain Byers came in for particular praise. Here are some sample comments on the design and illustration of Interzone:

"Excellent. An unfussy layout draws attention to the stories rather than allowing them to take second place to advertisements as in more commercial magazines";

"IZ 4 a great improvement — makes the magazine look less like a NATO first strike document and more like the bearer of quality fiction that it is";

"The recent introduction of illustrations has much improved the look of the magazine, but are full-page illustrations really necessary? The most aptly-illustrated story was 'Cheek to Cheek' (issue 3) — very economical!";

"As far as I am concerned illustrations in magazines of this type are pointless; they are usually for people without imagination";

"The layout is very good. Illustrations really add a special flavour to the stories; especially good is the Ian Miller cover on issue 4";

"Far too formal. Covers appalling. Some illustrations great. Far too old fashioned!!!!";

"Design too rigid and formal — let's have some chaos, mess and insanity";

"Typographically, attractive and readable. Illustrations are excellent — but drop them if production costs become prohibitive (the stories come first)";

"Needs more naked ladies — or gentlemen."

The final question we asked was: "What would you like to see in future issues?" The commonest wish was for more book reviews and non-fiction material — followed by "more new writers" and "more pages". You will have noticed that we expanded the magazine by four pages from issue 5 (and we hope to make it fatter still when finances permit). The current issue contains work by three completely new writers, and we introduced the talented Scott Bradfield to you last time. With this issue we are increasing the size of our author-profiles; henceforth we shall include a small feature article on, or interview with, at least one author per issue. We shall continue to publish book reviews, as copiously as space allows.

We were a little puzzled by the call for more non-fiction, and our first reaction was to reply: "read *Foundation!*" (see the advertisement elsewhere in this issue). For the past dozen years or more there has been no shortage of non-fiction material dealing with science fiction and fantasy. Journals such as *Foundation* and *Vector* have been readily available and have performed a useful function. In North America you can read *SF Studies*, *Extrapolation*, *Starship*, *SF Review*, *Locus* and several others. In many ways we have been living through an Age of Criticism — perhaps an unfortunate sign that the fiction itself is becoming "academic" and hence decadent. We began *Interzone* with the express purpose of creating a new British market for high-quality imaginative fiction; it was never our purpose to provide yet another forum for comment and chat.

Nevertheless we recognise that a magazine should be, as the term implies, a storehouse of different things. Whatever the main purpose of the publication, people expect some variety in a magazine, and with our increased amount of illustration and non-fiction we hope that *Interzone* has begun to provide that variety. The stories will always be primary, though.

To round off, here are a few more readers' comments in reply to the question about what people would like to see in future issues:

"More. Magazine too thin right now. Seems it's barely registered that I've started reading before I'm finished. But what's there is quite good";

"This magazine needs more aggressive and incisive editorial and review columns, especially the latter. More pages: I for one wouldn't mind paying £2 per quarter";

"Just keep building up these new authors. Give 'em encouragement";

"Stories by Asimov, Heinlein, Le Guin, Ellison, Clarke... OK, OK, only joking";

"Fatter issues, with more stories... Gene Wolfe, Tom Disch, and many more unknowns than at present";

"More science fiction!! 'Imaginative fiction' is so generalised as to be meaningless";

"Continuation of remit — 'imaginative fiction' in as broad a sense as possible. Maybe you could tempt some writers of mainstream fiction to try their hand in the *Interzone* area?";

"Aggressive, focused science fiction; no 'fabulation' or fantasy tripe; and NO MORE pointless interminable squabbling on the editorial page!";

"Excellence, experiment, figments of our collective psychosis. More of the same, in short";

"Something a bit more peppy and un-English — something with the impact of Dick or Brunner or Pynchon at their best. I find Ballard and his many imitators a wee bit stale and trite now, and much too male and stiff-upper-lip!";

"J.G. Ballard; John Crowley; Ian Watson; Richard Cowper.

Good writers famous and not-so-famous";

"More humour, more readers' letters, more psi stories";

"Giraffes, concrete mixers and plasticine";

"I don't know: surprise me! Half the fun is not knowing what to expect";

"Less self-consciously moderne fiction — ambiguity and obscurantism rule OK. More literate/atmospheric/moving/uplifting fiction of a fantastical nature";

"Atmospheric" stories, e.g. "The Quiet King of the Green South West". Stories with insight, new ways of seeing the familiar";

"You're doing fine without my help";

"Longer reviews — with all the talent on the editorial collective we could expect more in-depth reviewing";

"A few stories by me if I ever get around to writing them!"

It's been fun and it's been instructive to read these responses to the questionnaire. Clearly we cannot please all the people all the time, but at least we now have a better conception of our readers' tastes and opinions. We think that we shall learn by our mistakes — indeed we have already learned a great deal. *Interzone* will go on developing and in that process you can exert considerable influence. We need your letters. If you are one of the people who did not receive a copy of the questionnaire please do not hesitate to write to us and add your opinions to those summarised above. We feel sure we can only thrive on the continuing response of a lively readership.

David Pringle

Interzone gratefully acknowledges the financial assistance of the Arts Council of Great Britain.



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Something coming through

Cherry Wilder

Wheeler was alone in a strange city; a glance out of the eastern windows of his small apartment told him, morning and evening, that it was one of the strangest cities on the face of the earth. Deskar was very white. The sun at noon was flung back at the brazen sky from white walls of plexiglass, stucco, concrete and white-washed brick. The savage glare of the streets produced a painful equivalent of snow-blindness.

The local designers favoured the ramp and the covered way: they were partial to helices. At last, in the evening, when sunset turned the walls to rose and gold, Wheeler knew where he had seen Deskar. It was that 'city of the future' drawn by Twentieth Century artists. There it was at last, soaring impossibly, full of pointless pinnacles and staircases that went nowhere.

Wheeler had been placed by Intourist and the Department of Justice in a half-completed white apartment block a kilometer from the centre of the city. Roberta Nyass, the attorney, his only contact, assured him that it was not a tourist ghetto. He began to note down conscientiously all the persons he met in the apartment block. "Two Africans on the stairs, ?staff; German prospector, elevator three; M. Dupont, manager, terrace; African woman, western jeansuit, lower lobby."

His own apartment was on the top floor, the third; beyond the elevators was a makeshift partition of white and gold laminated metal. Through the cracks one could see the raw sides of the west wing plunging downwards and the workmen in djibbabs and white rags toiling on its construction.

Wheeler's journal was written very small on sheets of rice paper and hidden in the lining of his Macduff overcoat hanging in the wardrobe. He had intended to record interviews with Judi and Raoul and any of the proceedings he was permitted to witness. After the first interview he was driven back to his apartment in a state of abject terror and frustration. He wrote it all down with a shaking hand then remained wide awake

for twenty-four hours, prowling the four white rooms.

Roberta Nyass had briefed him thoroughly before he entered the Imperial Prison. He wore a white shirt and white duck trousers specially purchased for the occasion and carried photocopies of all his documents attested and sealed with red wax by two attorneys. He bore in his left hand a paper carrying bag from the tourist supermarket containing two bottles of orange juice, four melons, a round of bread, a tin of herring and a plastic basin. He was passed quickly through the outer wards into the search area where he had a huge black man in a robe of Imperial purple all to himself.

Wheeler spread his documents on the bench; the giant rose up slowly, flicking a fly-whisk, and smiled.

"Business is slack," he said in velvety Oxford English. "Relax, Mr Wheeler..."

He ripped off the ring-pull top of the herring can and deposited the contents in the plastic basin. He dipped a finger in the herring brew and tasted a morsel of the fish.

"The tins must be discarded," he explained, "because of the suicide risk."

He slashed open the four melons, selected two and put them aside.

"For supper," he said. "Do you know the cheese bar at the supermarket?"

"Sure..."

"The camembert is very good."

"I'll remember that," said Wheeler.

"Now the part you've been dreading," continued the guard. "Quite painless and not in the least humiliating."

He gestured Wheeler towards the shining metal search cabinet. Wheeler removed his trousers, handed them to the guard, stepped into the tall padded box and adjusted the chin rest. He was slightly off balance and had the sensation of falling forward. The guard searched the trousers quickly then moved to the control



panel of the cabinet somewhere beyond Wheeler's left ear. The X-ray hummed.

"How did you fracture your thigh, Mr Wheeler?" asked the guard.

"Ski-ing accident."

For a minute or so Wheeler concentrated on his memories of Sun Valley while invisible fingers probed and prodded his anatomy.

He left the search area for interrogation laden with the food in its disintegrating bag, the bowl of herring and, in his right hand, his documents. The Inquisitor was a spare, light-skinned man of about fifty, Wheeler's contemporary. His accent was unclassifiable. The examination lasted half an hour with the Inquisitor returning several times to his first questions.

"What is your relationship to the prisoners?"

"I am Judi Crane's stepfather. She is the daughter of my wife by a previous marriage."

"Do you have children with this wife?"

"We have one son, Jon...fourteen years old."

"Where does the mother live?"

"We live in the United States of America...California..."

"There is no such place as the United States of America."

"I mean, of course, the United States of North America, the USNA."

"You are aware the prisoners are wanted by the police in Toronto in the state of Ontario?"

"Yes."

"Are you aware of the charges against them?"

"Not exactly. They are Canadian Separatists who opposed mergence."

"I suggest that they are Terrorists and fall into the category of stateless outlaws against which every hand must be raised."

"That is incorrect. You...that is, the Imperial Government knows about these charges from local news print-outs carried by the young man, Raoul Martin," said Wheeler. "They are Separatists wanted in connection with a street demonstration."

"Well, it doesn't matter," said the Inquisitor. "We

have them so far only on the drug charges: Tobacco and Alcohol."

He made a note on his clipboard and returned Wheeler's documents.

"They risk the garotte for the alcohol but it is complicated by the tobacco. The two together may add up to the guillotine which is public."

"I protest!" said Wheeler, trying to keep his voice level. "This is a savage and inhuman penalty!"

"The guillotine?" asked the Inquisitor sadly. "Yes, it upsets the families, especially those of certain tribes."

"The death penalty for carrying alcohol and tobacco is hideously unjust!"

"Our Imperial reformed religion forbids alcohol, and the tobacco is a prohibited substance, specifically proscribed by the World Health Organisation."

"They didn't mean to enter your country!" burst out Wheeler. "They crossed an unmarked border zone by accident."

"They are here," said the Inquisitor.

"I protest!" said Wheeler.

"There is little hope," said the Inquisitor. "We may ask for a clarification from the USNA embassy in Tanzania. If they are declared to be terrorists the penalty is almost the same: firing squad."

He waved a hand and Wheeler scooped up his horrible possessions. He went through two more check points and found himself suddenly confronting Judi and Raoul through the bars of chromed steel. The sight of them, unharmed, clean and healthy, filled him with relief. He went forward grinning foolishly, and handed the food through the bars to Judi. A guard in magenta battledress on her side of the bars did not stir in his chair.

"Judi!"

He had recognised her at once even down to the pouting underlip. Raoul, whom he had never met, lounged in another chair chewing at a green leaf and scowling.

"Judi, how are they treating you?"

"Are you from the Embassy or something?" she asked solemnly.

Wheeler paused, waiting for her to identify him. He saw the whole structure of the visit falling to the ground if she really failed to recognise him. "You claim to be the girl's stepfather..." murmured the Inquisitor in his mind. Judi wiped her hands on her jeans.

"This fish is kind of sloppy."

"Herring..." said Wheeler.

"You're Griff Wheeler, right?" she said, without a smile. "Is Mom here?"

"No. She's not well. I made the journey. Are you comfortable, Judi?"

"Sure. We got busted."

"Judi, it is very serious."

She was a small girl with a pale, high forehead. Wheeler had always found her rather plain. Now her ragged short hair and slender neck put him in mind of Carl Dreyer's Joan of Arc.

"You better talk to Raoul if it's anything about extradition," she said.

She went and whispered to Raoul and the young man sprang up.

"You don't have to worry!" he said in a loud harsh voice. "We're fine. Tell those guys in the embassy that extradition won't work!"

"There is no embassy," said Wheeler. "Raoul, I was saying to Judi..."

"Pig!" said Raoul. "Stupid yankee pig! Why don't you go back home on the first plane!"

He was swarthy, handsome; his muscles bulged under a white T-shirt printed with a red maple leaf. Wheeler shuddered, looking at the somnolent guard.

"Your situation is serious, Raoul!"

"Get my name out of your mouth, pig!" said Raoul. "Judi, why the hell are you talking to this guy?"

He walked around the tiled enclosure making faces at Wheeler.

"Excuse him," grinned Judi. "He's high."

Wheeler jumped. The guard avoided his eye, took a green leaf from his pocket and began to chew methodically.

"We get a ration of this neo-vert...new green. It is kind of like coca," she explained. "Makes you feel better."

"New green?" asked Wheeler stupidly.

"Yeah..." she glanced at Raoul who was squatting on the seat of his chair and whistling. "Seems crazy. To be busted for tobacco, you know, and then given this ration. Some guys burn the new green...inhale the fumes..."

"Judi, do you know the penalty for carrying tobacco or alcohol?"

"Yeah, well, so it's five years or even ten. We're never going back. You serve the time somewhere else. We spoke to a guard who had French and he told Raoul you go to either the Ring or the Basket. If these places up country are half as good as this Imperial pen we will do fine. We get to share a cell, Griff; honestly, where else could you do that? The food is okay. We don't want to be extradited. They can't...the Yank Invaders have no treaty with the Empire."

Raoul came up to the bars again panting, his eyes rolling in his head.

"You don't have to worry," he said. "I've heard, I've had a message. We'll be out of here. We'll bust right out again."

Wheeler felt as if he were choking.

"We'll do everything we can," he whispered. "Your mother sends her love, Judi."

He turned away. As he hurried down to the nearest check point he heard Raoul laughing; Judi called after him something that might have been "Thanks for the herring."

Outside the prison gates kindly Madame Nyass bundled him into the official Merc Electra and they were driven through the blanched streets back to the apartment. Wheeler saw the tourist bazaar, the sparse, darting electric cars and mopeds, the gates of the Imperial palace, he saw all these things and did not see them. He sat numb and silent while the attorney recited ways and means, avenues of approach, things that might put off the evil day.

"Never lose hope, Mr Wheeler," she said.

A pair of swallows sliced across their path, twisted in mid-air so close to the windshield that Griff Wheeler saw the glitter of their eyes. The driver swerved, clever and quick as the birds themselves. Wheeler roused

himself a little.

"What is neo-vert...new green?" he asked.

Madame Nyass smiled.

"It is from the agave," she said. "Oh, it spread out very quickly. The plains by Hirondele were covered with the green leaves in no time."

Is it a stimulant?"

"A mild one, apparently."

They were already at the apartment block. Wheeler was so eager to be alone that he climbed the stairs to the third floor for fear that he might meet someone in the elevator. He began straight away to write down his minute account of the first prison visit. Half-way through he remembered that, if it were not a dream, he had passed a woman crouched down weeping on the stairs; the smart African woman in western dress whom he had seen earlier in the lobby.

He gritted his teeth and began a letter to Sara, his wife, rehearsing in his mind a second and truer account of things. The letter would be censored. He threw down his pen suddenly when the real letter became too difficult and the letter in his head became angry and desperate. It seemed certain that Judi and Raoul were going to die and he was powerless.

Wheeler prowled the four white rooms, lay down to sleep and rose up again, aching and unrefreshed. His discomfort was profound, a cerebral irritation, the more agonising because he regarded it as selfish. He could not think of Sara and young Jon; he could not think of Judi and Raoul. He sat motionless, his eyes unfocused until he was aroused by a thump or cry within the building, the sound of a dripping tap, a bird on the balcony, a whiff of resinous perfume.

He cringed at the thought of his next prison visit. His visa would last six weeks; this encompassed three visits to the prison. He did not leave the apartment for several days but at last his mood changed. His apathy gave way to a furious activity. He exercised in the bathroom, travelled up and down the elevators, jogged around the terrace behind the building.

When Roberta Nyass came to restock his refrigerator he talked greedily of ways and means. He examined the texts of his two petitions to the Emperor, inscribed in French on imitation parchment. The first begged for clemency for the prisoners; the second begged for an extension of his own visa so that he might witness their execution. He asked silly questions.

"There is no presumption of innocence," said Madame Nyass, shaking her magnificent green and gold turban, "and no appeal against sentence."

The day before his second visit he rode in elevator three with the German prospector who was in a talkative mood. He introduced himself to Wheeler: "Schwalbe, Gottfried!" and shook him warmly by the hand.

"I have been ordered home," said Herr Schwalbe. "I have something you might like...a book in English."

Wheeler was enthusiastic; they met in the same elevator next morning and transferred the book from Schwalbe's briefcase to Wheeler's airline satchel. That afternoon the Inquisitor's first question made Wheeler tremble.

"Now, about your books..."

"Books?"

"Your firm, Pegasoid Press."

"It is a small specialty publishing company," said

Wheeler, relieved.

This was a true description which suggested pornography to most strangers he met in the States.

"We print books," he continued, "no cassettes. Even a number of hard covers. We print, for instance, books in Braille and collectors' editions of English classical authors. In fact many of our customers are collectors..."

"The paper shortage must have affected you," said the Inquisitor.

"We use a little of the new pliokraft," said Wheeler, "and a range of rare, high-grade papers...willow paper from Japan, for instance."

"We have no problem with paper," said the Inquisitor, smiling. "Our forestry projects replenish our needs with excellent speed. Especially in the region of Hirondele."

Wheeler was allowed to gather up his groceries and before he came to the visiting room he realised that the Inquisitor had taken him momentarily into his confidence. He had made an ironic reference to the regime. Hirondele? Then he was confronted by Judi and Raoul, the chromed bars, the sleepy guard in magenta battle-dress.

They knew the truth. Wheeler was not sure if this was good or bad. Judi crouched shivering on a chair, Raoul approached and solemnly shook Wheeler's hand.

"She is depressed," he murmured. "Excuse my former behaviour, Mr Wheeler."

"We are doing all we can."

Wheeler felt afterwards that he had repeated nothing but this phrase throughout his visit. Raoul, on the other hand, talked a good deal about ways and means. Judi came forward once, white-faced, and sent love to her mother. Before the time was up Raoul said to him earnestly:

"Mr Wheeler...Griff...what I told you earlier was true..."

"What...?"

"I have no religion except perhaps the Work, you know, the Cause, but I have received a message of hope. I can't explain...I feel...something coming through..."

Wheeler could see Judi slumped in her chair, hopeless, stricken with the fear of death. As Wheeler turned to go Raoul held up a hand with two fingers spread in a V. In Wheeler's lifetime this had meant a couple of things and he knew it must have an even longer history. Raoul said with the firmness of habit:

"Canada Séparé!"

Wheeler was alone in his pearl-grey official auto this time and he had the driver set him down on the top of a long, spiral ramp about half a kilometer from the apartment block. It was late afternoon, not unbearably hot; the ramp was so high that he felt a breeze as he walked down. Foreigners were perfectly safe in the clean, uncrowded streets of Deskar.

He felt no anger after this visit but the beginnings of a sickening resignation. A long, silver shadow crept up beside him and Wheeler drew back against a white-washed wall. Then he noticed the diplomatic plates.

"I'm off!" called Herr Schwalbe, nursing his hand luggage. "Auf Wiedersehn, Mr Wheeler!"

"Wait!" said Wheeler. "Before you go...what is Hirondele?"

"Ssst!" said the prospector. "It is...was...a fast-breeder

up the country. Out of commission for months after an accident with the disposal of atomic waste. Top secret. The desert has blossomed...given the game away. Several new varieties of trees and plants. Does that answer your question?"

"Very well indeed!"

Wheeler stood waving until the auto whirled up to the top of the spiral. He walked on, brisk and gloomy, feeling the afternoon sun on the back of his neck. Three swallows darted into his line of vision above the curve of a roof and were joined by a fourth.

His revelation occurred when he was inside the white apartment block, inhaling its ill-conditioned air. He was on the stairs; he had passed Dupont, the manager, in the lobby, wiping his face with what appeared to be a checked dish-towel. Wheeler steadied himself against the stair rail in case he fell down, then ran reeling along the hazy corridor to his four rooms.

He did not dare put it into words but the message was one of hope. There was a joyful synchronicity in everything that he did, in everything that happened. He laid out all his books on the low table of glass and imitation ebony and opened the new Pegasoid Press edition of Palgrave's *Golden Treasury* at random:

"O swallow, swallow, flying south..."

He opened the well-thumbed Pegasoid catalogue at random, in fact at Ransom, Arthur: *Swallows and Amazons*. He shut his eyes and felt a warm intelligence all about him. He took up Herr Schwalbe's book: an English paperback of Anna Karenina, rubber stamped "Book Exchange for Cultural Freedom, 1957". It was a relic of the Empire's long infiltration by the Communist front, enough to bring him five years in prison. The yellowed pages had to be pried apart. He opened the book at page 180 and read on the facing page: "Four shots rang out and the snipe turned swiftly like swallows and vanished from sight".

Wheeler stepped out onto the balcony and gulped the smoky air of sunset. The feeling of joyous certainty was sharpened, it was like chords of music...Something coming through. Suddenly the air before him was filled by clouds of swallows; they dipped and circled. If he narrowed his eyes the birds seemed to weave bright patterns in the air. Several birds flew right in under the roof of the balcony and out again, in sweet erratic flight, so close that he could see their plumage, darkest blue and black, and the creamy flash of their underbodies.

He went indoors again and switched on the television set. It had not been used for days; he had given up even on the news broadcasts. He found himself staring into the bearded face of the Emperor, leaving some public ceremony. He searched the face for a sign but this was not enough. He directed all his own hope, his own certainty at the young man.

The Emperor raised a hand in salute; he wore a sky-blue uniform of antique cut, heavily laced with gold and silver. Wheeler sat back on his heels on the carpet as the Emperor entered his palace gates; he felt drained of power. The newsreel ended with a filler, a few frames of the palace gardens; a string orchestra began to play and he recognised the melody. La Golondrina...the swallow.

Wheeler lay down on his bed still in his crumpled white prison visitor's suit. He slept deeply. He felt himself sinking swiftly down through layers of downy unaccustomed sleep. He slept, exhausted, for hours, then dreamed sweetly, without pain, of Sara and Jon. He experienced with delight the garish colours and sounds of that ugly section of the great metropolitan seaboard where they spent their holidays. In his dream he looked with aching relief upon hamburger stands and the grimy, sluggish ocean.

He remained asleep and presently he saw in his dream the city of Deskar, still and silent under the moon. The whorled streets were empty; the glass bubble that carried the Muezzin to his perch hung glittering on its tower. Yet he knew that the citizens were merely sleeping; the domes and zigzags were packed with sleepers. In the Imperial Prison Judi and Raoul slept in each other's arms. As he watched from some vantage point a mist arose; planes of blue vapour unfolded among the night-cooled walls.

Soon after this dream Wheeler woke up; it was three o'clock in the morning. His euphoria had receded; it was a remembered warmth, like the dream of home. He wandered through the apartment, ate a banana, and stepped meditatively onto the balcony again. The image of the city from his dream was so strong that he was surprised to see no mist reaching through the streets.

Wheeler looked up and saw the stars. The sky fell down on him, it sank into his brain. The old certainty, that feeling of absurd good news grew and blossomed in and around him. He understood everything; he understood space and time; he understood and was absorbed into the totality of mankind. He saw that between the earth and the stars there stretched a web of intelligence, rarely perceived, benevolent and not impersonal. They were there. He personalised them as female. He felt his thoughts and the thoughts of countless billions of human beings living and dying and still living since the world began rising up to be absorbed into the net. He had no need to concentrate, to make any plea or supplication. Their understanding was complete. He hardly remembered going back to bed and falling asleep again.

He slept until nine o'clock and had to shower and shave and hide his copy of Anna Karenina in a hurry before the young cleaner arrived to do his rooms. He gave the boy Imperial currency and went down to the terrace to escape the roar of the vacuum cleaner. He breakfasted, as he often did, on half a melon and a can of mineral water. The morning had not become too hot; there was no wind; the view from the terrace was of the suburbs. Hectares of low, flat-roofed white houses, sprawled over low hills; there were trees...spindly palms and acacias...and rolling clumps of vines growing on to the roof-tops.

Wheeler did not know what to make of his mystical experience. He could not discount it but he could not discount the notion that it was a defence against the fear and stress he lived with in Deskar. He walked to the end of the terrace to throw his melon rind...but not his drink-can...into the tangle of vines below the iron railing. He stared, like a sidewalk superintendent, at the construction work on the new wing.

There were a great many earthen ramps that put him

in mind of the building of the pyramids; the three upper floors were coming along slowly; the completed ground floor, somewhere below the level of the terrace was the base for operations. The noise and clatter had not built up to its mid-morning crescendo which stopped abruptly about half-past eleven. Siesta lasted from this time until fifteen hundred hours; the workers withdrew to the shade of tents and awnings perched all over the site; the foremen slept in the roofed shell of the ground floor.

Coffee-breaks or their equivalent went on all the time; in shady places, under the awnings, there were always little groups of workers or hangers-on tending fires, cooking, offering pieces of fruit to the men toiling up the ramps with their barrows. In accord with the reformed religion of the Empire there were a few women with swathed heads who formed a work-group of their own; there were two female welders who worked in overalls like the other welders but seldom removed their helmets.

Wheeler stared at the busy scene; he realised that he didn't know enough about construction work to be shocked by primitive methods. The workers seemed happy and, in their own way, well-organised. Wheeler stared and felt his stomach lurch; he felt as if a tight band were being twisted around his forehead. He looked again, walking to the very edge of the terrace and leaning over the rail. He sighed and exhaled and began to laugh.

At every one of the small camp fires a man or a boy was feeding the iron brazier or cut-down oil-drum with bundles of half-dried leafy twigs. He could see no other fuel being burnt. Many of these small fires were close to the shady wall of the completed section of the building, the section where he lived. A haze of bluish smoke blanketed this wall; thicker puffs and tendrils were actually curling into the cracks and interstices of the wall. At two, three of the campsites he could see the faggots being prepared. He was so close to the lower level that he could see an old woman pluck off a still-green leaf and chew it before making a bundle of new green and prodding it into her fire. A rickety housing that was surely the air conditioning plant was half invisible in a cloud of the smoke.

Wheeler chuckled to himself; he felt bereft and lonely. He had his reasonable explanation. He remembered his dream of the city. An apartment house, a whole city zonked out. He suddenly knew the smell of new-green: a stale, resinous odour...the apartment block reeked of it. He wondered what the other residents had hallucinated, what feelings of strength and hope and certainty it had brought them. Raoul had had the same experience. Something coming through. Damn stuff must be dangerous to health. Smoke pollution could kill you! He turned, ready to find M. Dupont, drag him out on to the terrace if necessary and show that he managed a houseful of new-green heads.

“Mr Wheeler!”

It was an urgent, joyous shout. Madame Nyass came on to the terrace with her draperies flowing and her arms outstretched. She bore down on him and folded him into an embrace.

“Mr Wheeler! Mr Wheeler! They are free!”

“Judi and Raoul?”

“General amnesty,” she panted. “They were turned loose at eight o'clock!”

“Good heavens...” was all that Wheeler could find to say. “But why...where are they? Can I see...?”

“General amnesty,” she repeated. “You had better leave at once, this minute. The young people are waiting for you over the border at Checkpoint South.”

“Which border?”

“Checkpoint South gives on to the International Zone surrounding the Highway...”

“My plane ticket...” stammered Wheeler.

“No,” she said firmly. “For God's sake go with them in their safari wagon, Mr Wheeler. I cannot guarantee your visa any longer. Go with the children and drive back to the beaches of Namibia Free State where they came from in the first place. Stick to the Highway this time.”

She helped him pack; they were out of the apartment in twenty minutes. Instead of an official car Madame Nyass was driving her own battered BMW Electra wagon; Wheeler gave her his Imperial currency to change for him. He sat in the back seat and wrote away twenty thousand dollars in travellers' checks for his attorney's fee. M. Dupont had been nowhere about when they left; Wheeler had given no warning about the new-green pollution. Selfish, he reflected coldly, selfish to the last. But the kids were free, free.

They went swiftly spiralling up and down on the ramps and overpasses of the city, drove for some time on the long, beautiful avenue that led to the airport, then turned off through meaner streets. There was the border, complete with striped poles, pillboxes, and, at ten thirty in the morning, a trickle of incoming traffic. African women with handcars, boys on bicycles, several rattle-trap gas-burning trucks, packed with passengers, were entering as they approached. He realised that these folk were in fact Imperial citizens who had to cross the international zone surrounding the Highway in order to reach Deskar. The Imperial guards, in magenta battledress, with machine guns easily balanced, seemed friendly and obliging. Wheeler stared past them and saw a sight that pleased him beyond words. Three tall black men strode up and down with their machine guns easily balanced; they wore Khaki battledress and the blue helmets of the United Nations.

While Madame Nyass fixed things up, as she put it, at the guard house, Wheeler tried to catch sight of Judi and Raoul in their safari wagon. There were a few beehive huts and prefabricated sheds on both sides of the border. A party of children were playing with slingshots; a skinny cow, towed behind a bicycle, suddenly kicked up its heels, hit by a stone. Wheeler remained in a daze watching this peaceful third-world scene until Madame Nyass hustled him out of the car, pressed a few dollars upon him, and festooned him with his hand-luggage.

They walked forward, ducked under the corner of the raised, striped pole and passed into No-Man's Land. Wheeler was already stammering out his thanks, uttering farewells. Out of the corner of his eye he saw a little cloud of birds twisting around the vane of a silver windmill, the tallest structure beyond the border. At the same time he saw the wagon, parked in the shade of a beehive hut...yes, they were there, extravagantly waving to him. Judi sat on the half-raised canopy of

the wagon; Raoul, still in his maple-leaf T-shirt, was in the driver's seat. They were calling but he could not make out their voices. He wondered, seriously, if he were dreaming, if he would wake up in the apartment again.

"There they are!" said Madame Nyass. "Goodbye again, Mr Wheeler."

"But was there a reason?" he asked, trying to pull himself together. "Why was there an amnesty?"

"Didn't I mention that? The Emperor had a dream."

Wheeler could not speak; he looked back towards the city of Deskar, rising fantastic, dreamlike, in a haze of heat. He clutched his valise and strode out of the Empire; the smiling guard in his blue helmet stamped his documents and waved to Madame Nyass. Ahead Judi and Raoul still waved and shouted. He felt a smile grow on his face; the rule of reason was being re-established. As Wheeler passed beside the silver windmill he heard the voices of the children raised in a cry of triumph and a swallow fell dead at his feet.

Cherry Wilder was born on the underside of the globe in 1930. She is the author of the "Torin Trilogy" of sf novels: *The Luck of Brin's Five* (1977), *The Nearest Fire* (1980) and *The Tapestry Warriors* (1983), all published by Atheneum in the USA. She has also written *Second Nature* (Timescape, 1982) and has recently been working on a fantasy trilogy, "The Rulers of Hylor". She has contributed short stories to numerous anthologies as well as to *Galileo*, *Cosmos* and *Omni*. She has the following to say about herself:

"No one was aware that, from the fourth decade of the twentieth century, the centres of civilisation were being watched cloudily and intermittently by an entity far away. No, it wasn't a Martian, it was Cherry, in New Zealand, growing up in what is arguably the most beautiful country on earth, reading English Literature and being instructed in Anglo-Saxon attitudes. I was fond of 'the olden days' and received *Highroads To History*, a book of historical legends tied to dramatic nineteenth-century pictures: *The Little Princes In The Tower*, *The Battle of Trafalgar*, *The Battle of Waterloo*, and *When Did You Last See Your Father...*

"As a corrective to all this my father taught me the word propaganda; he was concerned about the fate of Abyssinia and taught me the name of its Emperor. We found it hard to believe that anyone could confuse a radio play with a Martian invasion but in a few years we ourselves feared invasion by the cohorts of the Emperor of Japan.

"New Zealand, that temperate jewel, and Australia, its giant neighbour, were both wracked by storms that originated in other galaxies...The Depression, The Great War. There was scarcely a family who had not lost a relative in this conflict and those who did return were often gassed or 'shell-shocked'. My father was killed in Crete in the Second World War.

"My parents were teachers and we had led an adventurous life together in a land that now seems only a step away from pioneering days. I read Verne and Wells and was always perfectly confident that humans would reach the moon once they put their minds to it. My English and Irish forebears had, after all, reached The Colonies in sailing ships, to be greeted by another bunch of my ancestors who arrived somewhat earlier in canoes.

"I began writing soon after I began to read and won a prize for a Santa Claus story in the Auckland Herald when I was eleven. I was bound to get back to fantasy. I wrote and published poetry during high school and university in New Zealand, then, after moving to New South Wales, I settled down to write literary short stories, with excursions into women's magazines and men's magazines. There was a

strong vein of fantasy discernible below the surface of these stories, certainly a sense of the strangeness of human existence.

"I always read science fiction and knew that one day I would write an sf story. This proved to be 'The Ark of James Carlyle' which Ken Bulmer published in *New Writings in SF* 24 in 1974. To my surprise this was the first story by a woman to appear in this long-running anthology... (I can still scarcely believe this and I appeal to any earlier contributor who was modestly concealed behind a male pseudonym to whip off the mask.) 'Carlyle' was a popular story and has been reprinted five times. It started a trickle of fanzines and letters which I enjoyed very much after the desultory editorial feedback of the lit. mags.

"Aussiecon 1975 gave a boost to sf in the land down under but I did not stay to enjoy it. Together with my husband Horst Grimm and our daughters Cathie and Louisa I headed at last for the Old World...we moved to West Germany in 1976. The castles are all that I had hoped for and the traces of many another empire lie all about us. I have been in England, I have even been to Stonehenge. Life in Europe, on the other hand, reminds me of the Chinese malediction 'May you live in interesting times!'

"Part of the inspiration for 'Something Coming Through' is to be found in Philip K. Dick's essay in the Peter Nicholls collection *Explorations of The Marvellous*. Wheeler, one of the last book-lovers, is under greater stress because he is afraid for two other people. Synchronicity struck several times during the writing of the story; when I discovered the reference to swallows in the battered Penguin edition of *Anna Karenina* I knew I was on the right track."

The border is open — between the image and the word.

Interzone would like to see the work of any story-strip artist — comic, cartoon, b.d., whatever — who thinks they could extend our narrative boundaries. The intention is to include one complete two-page strip in our seventh issue. The mode will be sf — interpret that as widely as we do. The style will be modern — and very good. Nothing that's been seen, glimpsed, even imagined before. We're open to work at any stage of completion, from camera-ready copy down to sketches and proposals. We're especially interested in ideas from anyone who'd like to collaborate with a writer from our collective.

Black and white copies only, please — no originals — and return postage if you want them back, to Interzone, 124 Osborne Rd, Brighton BN1 6LU.

Philip K. Dick News

Critic Paul Williams (known for his work on *Rolling Stone*) has been named executor of the late Philip K. Dick's literary estate. He is currently sorting through a large quantity of unpublished manuscripts, and has promised to submit any suitable material to Interzone.

Paul Williams has set up the Philip K. Dick Society, its purpose to publish a regular newsletter and occasional pamphlets of rare Dick material. All enthusiasts for Dick's work are cordially invited to join. The first newsletter is now out, and can be obtained by sending a \$5 membership fee to Mr Williams, PO Box 611, Glen Ellen, California 95442.

UK readers may join by sending £3.50 (or £6 if you wish to receive newsletter by airmail) to British agents Keith Bowden and Valerie Buckle, 47 Park Avenue, Barking, Essex IG11 8QU. Please make cheques or postal orders payable to "PKD Society".

THE MONROE DOCTRINE

Neil Ferguson

Milton Greene paused in the open doorway just long enough to give the scene framed in it a 250th at f5.6 through the Zeis lens in his mind's eye. The picture of the half-dressed movie star being groomed by her team of assistants was not one that audiences usually got to see. He regretted that for once he did not have a camera with him. But there had been times, looking at Marilyn, that Milton Greene regretted not being a camera.

Her wardrobe advisor, Agnes Flanagan, was calmly gathering up the articles of clothing that lay in colourful puddles over the floor, her practiced eyes scanning each garment for split zips and seams. Marilyn had nothing but contempt for clothes. They simply got in her way. She might be seen in public — or in the syndicated newspapers, which isn't always the same thing — with a piece of waistline squeezing out of her dress, and not give a damn. Nobody did. If anything, people loved her all the more because it showed she was not just someone with a thousand dollars to spend on a French silk day-gown. Any woman with a thousand dollars could do that. Not many could wear one like Marilyn Monroe.

Agnes was keeping a cool head amid the contradictory instructions coming from Marilyn and her other assistants, all of whom, Milton Greene included, were there to reflect her whim. She was their sun, mooring them in the universe like lesser bodies around her. Without Marilyn, Agnes would not be holding up the just-above-the-knee powder-blue dress in the mirror of the vanity-table; Whitey Snyder and his assistant would not be working on her face with the care and despair of boxing seconds prettifying their contender between rounds.

Milton Greene glanced at his watch: almost ten. The plane was waiting on the runway and Marilyn was still in her nightgown tossing conversation over her shoulder like free money. "Agnes, did you see those English girls? That Jean Shrimpton and that waif, Twiggy... Their dresses are so short! You gotta be skinny to wear them...."

"I'm not going to be wearing one."

"Agnes! I'm talking about me! No one wants tits anymore!"

Agnes had to laugh but she did not contradict her. "I'm such a fatty these days...."

"You're the same size you were ten years ago," Agnes reminded her. Which was no lie. Marilyn's measurements were recorded as faithfully as the rainfall by the Weather Bureau, being matters of almost equal importance to the Nation.

"Well, I feel a lot fatter!"

Milton Greene had woken her up personally to give her the news but, from the way she was acting, nobody would have guessed whether it was the latest international crisis or some shock ball-game result: the Yankees whupped in an Okie fixture. Milton Greene, however, never underestimated Marilyn's picture of a situation. Having been married to Arthur Miller and to Joe DiMaggio, she knew the difference between a crisis and a ballgame.

"Short skirts are fine for the beach," Agnes said, "but for this you need some style."

"Miniskirts are the style in England now."

"Who cares? We're not going to England!"

"Sure we are! We stop over there."

"But it'll be the middle of the night when we do!"

Marilyn opened her mouth to speak...

"Will you shut your mouth," quiet Whitey Snyder said. "Please Marilyn, so I can get some kind of line. It's like painting the side of a ship!"

Agnes took the opportunity to put out of Marilyn's mind any notion that she could step off a plane in London or any other place with a skirt ten inches above her knee. "Honey, you don't want to be showing the colour of your underwear to this bigshot you're meeting, whoever it is...."

Whitey made sure Marilyn was unable to answer so Milton Greene took another step into the room and said: "Leonid Brezhnev, is who."

"Milton!" Whitey Snyder's hands froze as Marilyn searched the mirror. "Where've you been? Did you get the tickets?"

"You don't need tickets," he reminded her. Marilyn still hadn't gotten used to the idea that she had an Air Force jet at her disposal any time she wanted one. At heart she was just another private citizen.

"You know what I mean. Is everything ready?" she

said and let Whitey take up from where he left off.

"Westmorland and Bobby Kennedy are pacing the Conference Room in opposite directions," Milton Greene told her. "Waiting to give you the latest situation report. Naturally they have opposite ideas about what you should do about it."

"What do you think, Milton?" Marilyn said, patting her hair in the mirror, either referring to her coiffure or to the crisis in hand. Milton Greene grinned at the first possibility and, to the second, said: "Search me, honey."

Wasn't this just what Bobby Kennedy ached after? None of the White House staff could walk into the President's bedroom while she was dressing and have their opinions asked for. Only her friends could do that and none of them, when it came to affairs of State, had any opinions. Milton Greene was happy just to take photos of her. Wasn't that enough to ask from life?

But Bobby Kennedy was downstairs eating his liver because he could not have Marilyn all to himself. The poor fool! No one could own her. She belonged to everyone. All Kennedy could do, the same as everyone else, was give her as much as possible of the vast quantities of love she got through as fast as some people do bottles of Johnnie Walker or Marvel comics.

General Westmorland was eating his liver for different reasons. His reaction to bad news — in this case the Russian invasion of Czechoslovakia — was always the same: to have the newly formed cavalry units — armed with Mr Gatling's self-breach-loading machine guns firing 360 shots a minute — burn up the motherfuckers' village while they were still asleep on their bows and arrows. Fortunately in Marilyn Monroe the country possessed a President who had never enjoyed Westerns. She had no interest in power. What drove her was a need to be loved, to be part of a family. It had driven her out of the Los Angeles Orphans' Home and across the tracks into the Columbia Studios. Nobody had taken seriously a Californian movie star's bid for the highest executive office while she was whistle-stopping across the country on a ticket that if no one else was going to stop that Dick Nixon then she would, but by the time her pink Caddy was driving through the gates of the White House they had learnt to love her. By then she had found her family. It was called America.

As soon as Marilyn ran into the Conference Room, Kennedy and Westmorland quit pacing and, to Milton Greene, looked as if they suddenly wanted the same piece of air. "Morning Bobby," she said breathlessly. "...General...Am I late?"

"They arrested Dubcek," Kennedy said. "As well as his Cabinet."

"His cabinet?" Marilyn look confused. "What d'they do that for?" Milton Greene had to smile at the picture he imagined she had of soldiers stiff-arming some piece of drawing-room furniture. But with Marilyn you could never be sure. She had a sense of humour.

"That's his ministers," Westmorland said helpfully. "The Russians have twenty divisions in there."

"What about the Czechs, how are they taking it?"

"Lying down."

"You mean...They don't care?"

"They're lying down in front of tanks. And throwing rocks at them. They're setting fire to themselves in the

street because they don't have twenty divisions to care with!"

Milton Greene waited for something to fill the emptiness in Marilyn's eyes. Finally Kennedy said: "A student called Jan Pallach sat himself down in the main square in Prague, poured gasoline over himself and put a match to it. He took three minutes to burn."

"To himself?" Marilyn's voice quivered. She might just have seen an auto accident.

"Nobody twisted his arm," Kennedy said.

"Unless..." Westmorland corrected with a smile.

"You count a tank corps with infantry and air support." He was loving this. "M33 tanks with Kalashnikov anti-personnel cannons. What we must do..."

Milton Greene gazed through the open window at all air outside, imagining himself breathing some of it. Bright-coloured leaves lay here and there across the patch of mown lawn he could see, lying very still like the uniforms of soldiers after the charge, where they had fallen.

"C'mon, Milton," Marilyn said, turning to him. "We better hurry. The plane'll be waiting."

Westmorland and Kennedy stopped bickering and looked at Marilyn as if suddenly remembering she was present. What the hell did she know about War or Diplomacy? She was a woman, an actress, not even that, a movie-star with big tits. The movement of an army across the face of Europe was not something that happened every day, couldn't she get that into her pretty little head?

"What goddamn plane? You can't take off to some movie premier. Not now!" Westmorland said spitefully, aiming a look without any love in it at Marilyn's photographer.

"Where are you going Marilyn?" Kennedy asked.

"Why...Czechoslovakia of course. What did you think? I had Milton telephone the airport soon as he told me the situation. Didn't he tell you?"

This was the part Milton Greene enjoyed. He said nothing. Suddenly the General's big uniform looked a size too small for him. "You intend flying into a Soviet war zone?"

"What else can I do?"

Westmorland said nothing and Bobby Kennedy said: "Nothing!"

"Then it can't hurt any if I talk with Brezhnev," Marilyn said as if the matter were settled.

"He isn't in Czechoslovakia. He's in Moscow," Kennedy informed her.

"Telephone him then Bobby, honey. Ask him to meet me there."

"In a bar?" Kennedy sneered. "Or some movie theatre?"

Marilyn smiled. "Oh I don't mind. I'll leave it to him." To Milton Greene she said again: "C'mon Milton. Let's go. Mustn't keep the Air Force waiting." She blew a kiss in the direction of her two advisors — just one, so they would have to fight over it. "Bye boys. Look after America for me while I'm gone." Then she ran out of the door that Milton Greene was holding open for her.

"What do I tell Brezhnev?" A desperate Kennedy called after her.

"Tell him he has a date with Marilyn Monroe," Milton Greene, following her out, said. "So he better not be late!"

Aboard the President's jet Marilyn was reassuring Bobby Kennedy over the ground-to-air: "Sure it's me honey. What did they say?"

"What I would have said. The same." Kennedy's more-American-than-thou voice amplified through the suite. "They refused to believe me."

"Why not? Brezhnev and me will meet and talk things over. In this kind of fix it's the only..."

Czechoslovakia seemed a long way off to Milton Greene. He would have preferred not to have been party to Marilyn's conversation. Below, through the portal, the dirty-grey Potomac slowly receded, the morning sun decalced on its surface like a nice girl on the wing of an old bomber.

"They told me any alien aircraft in their air space would be in violation of internationally agreed air-conduct treaty and would be treated as hostile. They will intercept. Tell the pilot to turn back, Marilyn."

"They would shoot us down!"

"Of course. We'd do the same. How do they know you aren't an ICBM?"

"Well..." Marilyn never liked to sound ignorant. "And am I?"

Milton Greene felt sure he could hear Kennedy's teeth grinding. "No Marilyn. You may be our secret weapon but you would never destroy a city the size of Prague. By the way, how's your Russian? Brezhnev speaks no English."

"VCHERA! That's Russian for TODAY." Marilyn said as if that was going to open doors for her.

"It's Russian for YESTERDAY!"

"Oh well," she giggled. "I guess it'll be yesterday by the time we get there. If they shoot be down, promise me you'll look after Mitzou, Bobby..." Mitzou was Marilyn's cat. "Dosfordania!" she said lightly, but lowered the telephone into its cradle as carefully as if it had been a baby, as one does after the other party has

replaced theirs without saying goodbye. She lay back and lowered her eyelids. Soon she was asleep.

After London, on the final leg of the journey, Milton Greene also got some sleep. At least, he dreamed he did. He dreamed there was a bump as if something was striking the fuselage from the outside. With a start his eyes opened on Marilyn peering into Whitey Snyder's portable mirror. So they were landing. This meant the Russians had not shot her down. They had decided the plane was not an Inter-Continental Ballistic Missile after all. Marilyn had not arrived yet and already she had them taking risks.

Outside the morning was as pale as the face of a sentry who has been on duty all night and doesn't care who knows it. The world looked flat and bloodless and about as much fun as the opening sequence of a European art movie. Milton Greene surveyed with alarm the army officers on the tarmac and the automatic weaponry in their hands, while beside him at the opening hatch the President of the United States waved and smiled and blew kisses in their direction as she had learnt to do with men in uniform during her tour of Korea. Wide, unAmerican faces stared back at her, blank as snow. Clearly this woman in a powder-blue silk day-dress who had stepped out of the sky like a goddess was not a contingency they had been briefed for at the Academy. Their automatic guns rattled with embarrassment. Marilyn disarmed them.

"They'd be a lot happier with a few Pentaxes," Milton Greene murmured to Agnes as they descended the ramp, although what he meant was that he, Milton Greene, would have been happier.

Marilyn had starred in so many movies that by now reality followed her around like an expensive studio



camera. Her presence transformed the dismal grey airport into a location erected solely for her performance. She breathed life into it.

The big lighted foyer they stepped into could have belonged to an interstate Bus depot in Galveston during the Depression. The décor was not what a connoisseur would have called rococo. A platoon of generals with faces as expressive as taxidivers escorted Marilyn's party in. At least Milton Greene assumed they were generals; their uniforms had nothing in common with the hotel livery which the US big brass wore. No gold lace or sign of rank. They might all have been corporals. He had no idea who was who and he felt pretty sure Marilyn hadn't either.

"Say fellas, I'm really sorry to put you to all this trouble..." she was saying as Milton Greene became aware of a posse of civilians lined up across the foyer, standing perfectly still, chests out, like brave men in front of a firing squad. They must have been brave; none of them was carrying a gun. Abruptly all the soldiers came to attention behind them. Agnes Flanagan took hold of Milton Greene's arm. Whitey Snyder looked no whiter than he usually did. Marilyn was trying to make herself understood by a dignitary who might have been Chief of Staff or the person who checked your ticket and asked to see your visa. Not having either, Marilyn was giving him a smile you could have opened a bank account with. Maybe he was a customs officer listening to whether she had anything to declare but from the way he shook his head it didn't look as if he could make up his mind whether or not to believe her story. No-one could have called her smile exactly innocent.

"Boy!" Marilyn's voice piped, her arm linked inside the arm of the Chief of Staff, "Couldn't I do with a drink!"

The overcoats and the uniforms closed in, eyeing her like rival horse-traders. Milton Greene found himself being addressed by a civilian who spoke English — as opposed to the kind of American he spoke himself — with a British accent. Obviously the Reds still thought the British counted for something. "Good morning. Did you have a good flight? You are President Monroe's interpreter, I presume?"

"No, I dreamed you shot our plane down. And I don't speak a word of Russian," Milton Greene said. "Who are you?"

The man made a good stab at looking friendly. "Uri Gregorovitch."

"Pleased to meet you, Uri." They shook hands. "Milton Greene."

"May I ask what your position is?"

Translating his question into American, Milton Greene said, "You mean what do I do? I'm a photographer."

"You are security personnel. I understand."

"The hell you do. I'm just a friend of Marilyn. I take pictures of her. None of us speaks Russian. Or Serbo-Croat. We have an appointment with President Brezhnev." Milton Greene grinned. "Take me to your leader!"

Uri Gregorovitch let that one go. "That's him, the comrade whom Miss Monroe is talking to," he said.

"Ah ha. Well, first: Marilyn is no Miss. And second: how good does the President speak English?"

He let the interpreter drag him to where Marilyn and Agnes were surrounded by the cream of the Red Army.

He was beginning to feel better. This was just like a cocktail party only without the cocktails.

"Say, Milton," Marilyn cried out to him. "Agnes and me were just trying to explain to this nice waiter here what a Coke is..."

"This nice waiter," Milton Greene said. "Is Leonid Brezhnev."

"He is? How did you find out?"

"Uri Gregorovitch here told me. He's an interpreter."

Marilyn turned to him. "Uri, d'you think you could rustle us all up something to drink? With plenty of ice. I'm so goddam thirsty I could spit cotton balls!"

While Uri gave instructions everyone tried on their best smile. The way those old warriors smiled you might have been forgiven for thinking they had once been young, had once felt soft fingers stroke their skin and nothing else under the moon had had any importance for them. "Sorry Marilyn," the interpreter reported. "No ice."

"What!" Marilyn said in her dumb Sugar Kane voice: "Is there some kind of thaw on?"

If there wasn't, that cracked whatever ice there was still around; the Russians were chuckling! Genially they propelled the Americans towards a large empty bar behind which a forlorn barman stood polishing glasses. He was, everyone realised as soon as the soldiers gave their orders, a Czech. It was a sticky moment until Marilyn called to him: "Sweetheart, make mine a scotch," smiling. "Forget the ice!"

The scotch had the bouquet of an operating theatre; it had Milton Greene panting for air and the Russian President slapping his back. "Not so fast! This is good vodka!" — so good, apparently, it gave Milton Greene the gift of tongues. Brezhnev laughed the laugh of the proprietor of a liquor able to lick his rivals. It was developing into quite a party. If Marilyn could make these big Russians laugh, he could relax. Even the barman was beginning to cheer up.

Smiling like someone's father-in-law, the President of the Soviet Republics touched Marilyn's glass with his own: "Prosit!"

"Vchera..." she replied.

"Niet!" Brezhnev corrected her. "Prosit!"

"Prosit! Is Russian for 'Your health';" Uri Gregorovitch said. "Vchera means Yesterday."

"I know..." Marilyn continued. "Vchera dosfordania..."

"Yesterday goodbye..."

"A-ha. Vchera dosfordania Jan Pallach."

The interpreter looked helpless.

"Or as we say in pictures, he got dead."

"Who?"

"Jan Pallach!" Milton Greene chorused with Agnes and Marilyn. Brezhnev, he noticed, had stopped laughing.

At that moment the barman said something in Russian that had all the soldiers jerking their eyes in his direction. Milton Greene wondered whether they were about to order a Jan Pallach from him. If that was the case he felt sure it wouldn't have tasted like a Tom Collins. Another sticky moment. Marilyn waited; she had said her lines. There was a silence a baby could have fallen asleep in. Milton Greene could hear the interpreter breathing. Or maybe it was just a floorboard creaking somewhere. Finally Brezhnev spoke.

"The President," Uri relayed: "Is sorry. He has not

been informed about any Mata."

"Any what?"

He said it again, pronouncing "martyr" as the British say "tomArto" when they mean "tomato" but in Marilyn's LA-suburb-so-near-Hollywood-it-makes-no-difference it sounded like how a Britisher thinks a Bronx New Yorker pronounces "Mother?"

"Mother?" the interpreter echoed, sweat on his brow. Communication was breaking down. Boy was he earning his money!

"You are cowards! All of you! Cowards..."

So Marilyn had decided to raise the temperature. Even by now Milton Greene could not always be certain when she was acting. Nor, he suspected, could she herself. Her method of acting tapped the root of something painful inside her and when it happened she became a piece of live wire; she needed an audience just to earth all the electricity she was giving out.

"...What d'you think Czechoslovakia is feeling — that's if it's got any feelings left! — you big men with nothing to justify being here except more tanks?" She let them think about that for a while. When nobody said anything she told them. "Like Jan Pallach's mother is how, whose kid just set fire to himself on account of the M33 tank up his back yard!" The interpreter was murmuring in fast Russian, his voice soaking up Marilyn's performance. He sounded good, but not as good as she did. "You invade a small country the size of Texas with twenty divisions that all the Czechs can do is throw rocks at. You put Ducek and his cabinet in jail..."

"You said something about Texas," Gregorovitch said. "The President would like to know if you remember the Alamo."

"Sure I do. It was one helluva lousy picture."

Whether at that moment the barman made a sharp move, something shiny in his hand, or he didn't, no one will ever know for sure because just as he did — or didn't — Brezhnev went to slug Marilyn — or maybe to take her in his arms — who screamed as a pistol cracked and a bullet from nowhere buried itself in Milton Greene's chest, the reflection of it in the bar mirror in front of him, narrowly missing the barman who had already fainted, still holding onto the cocktail shaker.

Nobody moved. Milton Greene's heart fluttered like a clay pigeon. Finally Brezhnev — his arm still around the President of the United States — hollered, and the generals grabbed one of the civilians — some jumpy secret service man — and took away his gun; obviously he couldn't be trusted with one. The tension had snapped, a spark had passed between opposite poles. It had not proved fatal but Milton Greene wished the barman would wake up; his mouth was dry as an empty barrel, one he could still taste the cordite in. Who said Hollywood was the only place that could make pictures?

Next day Milton Greene woke up somewhere and quickly looked around to see where it was. Rather too quickly. With a lot of respect for whatever the Russian is for a cracking hangover, he lowered his head back onto the carpet. Where was he? And why? His recollection of the previous day was blank. Gently, behind closed lids, he removed with mental fingers the piece of film in his mind's eye, expertly imagined each step in the developing process, then waited for

something to appear on the paper floating in his memory. Eventually he began to make out Marilyn at her vanity-table, framed in the doorway; then the grey Potomac seen from the air; then the deserted foreign airport; the reception party and the gun going off; the drive out of the city, tanks in the streets; the huge old chateau out of a fairy tale; more vodka; finally the two most influential people in the world not talking the same language but dancing together. Cheek to cheek! No wonder his head hurt!

After that he tried again. This time he made it as far as the bed, a nice cool friendly-looking bed that someone had recently not slept in. Milton Greene had a hunch he knew who it was. Instead of getting into the bed, however, he headed for the door, curious about where he would find his reason for being there.

She was sitting in a kitchen the size of a ballroom, leaning back in a chair explaining something to Leonid Brezhnev who at that moment was sliding a fried egg from the skillet in his hand onto the plate in front of her, a white apron around his big belly and such a look on his face you could have believed Marilyn's egg was his only care in the world. A big grin spread over Brezhnev's face — he'd done it! — as he looked up and saw Milton Greene standing in the door.

Uri Gregorovitch was seated at the other end of the table with his head over a chessboard as if he had not noticed Milton Greene's arrival. The low obligato of Russian words coming from him, however, suggested his mind was not entirely on his game.

"Hi!" Marilyn called out while Brezhnev, still grinning, made a gesture with the skillet which an Eskimo could have interpreted. "Sleep well?"

"Like a piece of lead," Milton Greene replied. "In my own heart."

"Comrade Brezhnev," Gregorovitch said, looking up. "Would like to know if you'd like eggs for breakfast, Milton."

"You bet!" Milton Greene said but he had already made an ambiguous nod towards the Comrade in question. He was beginning to feel better already. No one seemed to mind that he had lurched off in the middle of the party. Had they been up all night? Or had they been lucky and found their beds? "Sunny side up please, Leonid," he said.

Brezhnev chuckled. "With respect, Milton," Uri Gregorovitch moved one of the chess pieces. "He knows how to cook an egg."

"He does?" Milton Greene began to understand why Brezhnev was President of the Soviet Republics. "In that case, tell him I'll start filing for a divorce as soon as I get back to the States!"

Brezhnev laughed like a big friendly bear. "Comrade Brezhnev regrets to inform you but he's already engaged." The interpreter moved another piece. "To Marilyn!"

"Not so fast!! I can't marry you!" Marilyn piped, just keeping the panic out of her voice. "This egg's cooked so darned well I can hardly bear to eat it!" The way the words asked, anyone would have thought she had been asked to stab a baby chicken; her fork hovered over the yoke as if she could not bring herself to do it. When she did — suddenly — the three men laughed with relief. But for a moment she had them shaken.

Milton Greene knew Marilyn could make people

laugh but the interpreter wasn't bad either. On his chessboard the red and white pieces were set out from left to right as if he were not playing a game but plotting the progress of a battle: translating the conversation into chess moves. If this was the case, so far things looked pretty even. "You're good, Uri," Milton Greene said while Brezhnev cooked and Marilyn started into her egg.

"How good is that, Milton?"

"Better than just OK, I guess."

"Is that all?"

"Well..." Milton Greene paused to think.

"Do you mean 'well' as an interjectory adverb, or as a qualifying one?"

"As in 'Well I'll be damned'."

Uri looked up from his board. "I do my job *well* which is better than just good."

"Well and good, what's the difference?" This was such an obvious thing to say Milton Greene knew it had to be dumb. He regretted having started this. Clever conversation wasn't his department.

"A great deal. Adjectives — good, bad, American, drunk — say something about nouns, of course. But adverbs are in tow to verbs which are stronger, more versatile — as a bishop..." He laid a finger on the piece. "...Is stronger than a knight."

"That's a matter of opinion," Milton Greene was not certain he followed the language-wizard's drift but he was damned if he was going to allow this foreigner to tell him how to speak. Something told him he was being made to take sides in the conversation that was being played out, as if Brezhnev was pitching his strong verbs against Marilyn's concrete nouns. "You don't want to underestimate nouns," he said. "Earth, tanks, America, vodka...things you can take photographs of."

From the cast-iron stove, Brezhnev said something which Gregorovitch reprocessed: "Marilyn, the President understands when you say you felt abused and exploited during your early career. As a woman and as an employee you were doubly cheated. That's why you left the Fox Studio. To gain the means of production!"

"Me? I never produced a thing in my life," Marilyn said, as if this fact had occurred to her before.

"He means the production of films."

"Oh, you mean movies!" Marilyn laughed, her throat white as a truce flag. "I never controlled a movie-production yet! Thousands of men run the industry. Not me!"

"Not the President of the United States?"

"Look, to most Americans the President is just someone who looks good on TV. It could be any poor fool."

"No one is suggesting you're a fool, Marilyn," Gregorovitch said gravely.

"I never said I was..." Marilyn began to pour out coffee into four cups. "...intelligent. I look better on TV than Nixon, is all. That wouldn't be difficult."

Gregorovitch's hand hung over the board as if he could not make up his mind which piece to move next. Brezhnev placed an egg in front of Milton Greene — sunny side up but with no more interest than any roadside short-order cook. His mind was elsewhere, on this beautiful American film star. Was he learning that communicating with her required areas of his psyche he had probably not used since he was in short

pants? She was no fool, merely a woman who reasoned with her heart. Her beauty did not lie in the cosmetic stereotype she manipulated with such dialectic skill; her presence was greater than all the things that could be said about her. Marilyn may not have been the first international leader who was a woman but she was maybe the first who did not attempt to compete with men in terms of those clever right-handed skills with which men for centuries had ordered the universe: logic, language, ideology. Marilyn had Brezhnev bothered. He was no different than other men.

"Put it this way," Brezhnev plodded on. "The American people elected you, someone trying to gain the means of production..."

"Me? No more than anyone else is. No more than Jan Pallach! Anyone who pours gasoline over himself and sets fire to it must feel desperate but at least he's going to produce the spark. That's what he's saying to you Russians. With your tanks in his streets, *that's* the only goddamn freedom he's got!"

"Comrade Brezhnev," the interpreter sighed, his face as grey as the line between truth and fiction, "is sorry to hear about his story."

"Who's talking about history? It only happened yesterday!"

All Milton Greene could hear was his own knife cutting his egg. Yet another communication breakdown.

"By committing suicide, Jan Pallach opted out of history," Gregorovitch said. Suddenly Milton Greene understood what the game was about. Verbs are agile and clever; they toss nouns around as strong men do sacks of cement, humping and dumping them, changing them into something else. It was verbs mobilized tanks to cross Europe, that set fire to Jan Pallach, that sent Gatling guns into sleepy Indian villages. Brezhnev was no different than Westmorland but in Marilyn Monroe they were coming up against a woman they could not change. To Marilyn everything was a noun — a thing, not a process — including everything Westmorland or Brezhnev could do or say to her. History was a noun. The World was one. In the end.

"In the end," Milton Greene heard himself say: "Jan Pallach did not commit suicide. He was sentenced to death."

Uri Gregorovitch made a minute smile and moved a pawn. "Check?" he murmured.

"Well," Milton Greene, with egg in his mouth, said. "He sure as hell wasn't Russian!"

Leaving Brezhnev with the washing up, Marilyn led Milton Greene out of the room and into the extensive garden in the back of the building, put his arm around her and hugged into his body. The cold smoked their breath in the clear air. Under Gregorovitch's greatcoat, Milton Greene held her silk-covered arm and waited for her to speak. In silence they followed the path in and out of sculptured laurel trees until the big eighteenth-century chateau became a piece of fairy cake. He felt oppressed by the tired elegance of Europe, its subtleties of mood no camera he owned could ever capture.

"Marilyn. What Brezhnev said in there...About you two being married." Her eyes, hooded within the collar of the greatcoat, opened. "What did he mean?"

"Oh that! Leonid thinks he wants to marry me." Her

voice seemed to bruise on the effort of saying the words.

"He was serious!"

"Oh sure. He's the old-fashioned sort. Likes to do everything kosher."

"But you can't marry Brezhnev!"

"I can't? Why, is he married already?"

"Probably...But he's a communist! President of the Soviet Union! Try explaining that to Westmorland. It would be like Night marrying Day."

"Sounds to me like a good reason for giving it a try."

Milton Greene knew he was going to burst into tears or laughter, but which? "When did you decide?"

"Last night. This morning," Marilyn shrugged. "It just decided itself. Leonid likes me. I make him feel good."

"YOU SLEPT WITH HIM!"

"Why sure, Milton. You disapprove?"

Of course he damn well disapproved! "Marilyn, you know who you sleep with is none of my business. I just think..." Suddenly he burst into laughter. "It's one helluva way of conducting diplomacy!"

"I was never very diplomatic."

"You're doing fine, Marilyn. I'm sure no-one negotiated a peace like this. But where do we go from here? The tanks are still in Prague. If your...union with Brezhnev is to have political results..."

"Political? You don't understand, Milton. We're getting married. We'll have children."

For a moment Milton Greene felt what Bobby Kennedy must have to go through all the time. "I guess you might," he said.

"No might can stop it. I know we will. Sometimes a woman knows when it's happened. I know. I'm going to have Leonid's baby!"

"Hey, Duchess! Milton Greene called down the length of the bar to where a girl was hunched over a paperback book. "Two more of the same!" The young woman closed her book and turned to draw the beer while Milton Greene continued his disquisition with Uri Gregorovitch. "From what I hear Westmorland is doing his darndest to have her impeached but he can't swing that, not after all Marilyn has done for the blacks and women in the Senate. They won't walk out on her now," he said. "And Bobby Kennedy has been in tears since he arrived, trying to change her mind. The way he talks you'd think the Girl Next Door was marrying the Garbage Collector. That's the kind of reaction it has bought." Without a word the girl placed two fresh quarts of pilsner beer in front of them. Milton Greene batted her an eyelid as he took a bite out of the beer, grateful to lay hands on a drink that was not 100% potato juice. "Have one yourself kid," he said, a thin moustache of foam on his top lip, grinning. Now that the emergency had all but passed he was learning to like Prague, its marbled skies churning the light over a joyous architecture, birds and silences hidden inside the human curve of its Baroque. He liked the dignity of the Bohemian woman behind the bar who had a name as long as a Sunday afternoon and spoke English as if it were blank verse.

"Thanks," she told him. "I will."

"...But if you're asking me what kind of reaction it has bought in America, Uri, I'd have to tell you people are wetting themselves. Americans are like kids at a Christmas party when it comes to a celebration. You wait till the rodeo bands start arriving, the cheerleaders...Uri, you ain't seen nothing yet! These planes coming in every day, each one full of Yankee razmatazz, cowboys, baseball teams, rock and roll, sex, plus all the bad taste Hollywood can ship over here. You don't think it's going to pass up an opportunity like this? The way Hollywood sees it, they're just making a return on what it cost them to put Marilyn in the White House."

Gliding towards them, the bar person put her own glass on the bar and lounged discreetly into the conversation. White hands of an aristocrat, Milton Greene surmised. Or maybe from having washed too many glasses in cold water.

"What's the news from your camp? How come the Russians are putting up with it?"

"How do you stop kids?" Gregorovitch said. "They find it hard enough trying to keep pace with Europeans. How d'you think they can cope with pretty girls in mini-skirts, red indians...Their guns are made for shooting people."

"Relax! The sight of fifty teenage crowd warmers for the Arkansas Warriors will melt the heart of a tank captain."

"You think so?"

"If it doesn't, there's always Detroit Thunderbirds, Texas beer, New York style...The Czechs may not get happier, but they sure as hell are going to get richer!"

"Maybe that's what's eating me, as you would say," Gregorovitch said. "In all this fuss over Marilyn, we seem to be forgetting Czechoslovakia."

"So is that such a bad thing? At least Marilyn has got the tanks off the street!" Milton Greene then turned to the Czech girl. "What do you think, Duchess? Let's have your two cents worth."

She said nothing. Milton Greene began to think she had not followed the drift. Then, as if reciting words learned by heart, she said: "The game is finished that you gentlemen have been playing with us. There is not Czech or Slovak, no America or Russia. These are words, names of peoples for kings and generals. Are we not all one under the same sun? Human love is the womb of history. Unless the strong can touch the weak within itself, our dreams of heaven will destroy the earth. Unless we make the army generals laugh and cry, lay hands gently on soldiers' sleeves, we are no better than the frightened dog that bites its own tail."

Milton Greene raised his glass. The Russian interpreter and the Czech bar person did the same, touching their glasses together. "I'll drink to that," he said.

Neil Ferguson was born in 1947 and now lives in London. He is the author of an unpublished sf novel, *Rats Live on No Evil Star* (also known as *Fear of Chance*). John Clute is reputed to have said of this: "It is a Philip K. Dick novel... It is not one of his best but it is by no means one of his worst." The story above is Neil Ferguson's first, unless one counts "A Man from the Future", an amusing piece of "critical fiction" which appeared in *Foundation* 27 (February 1983).

the views of mohammed el hassif

John Hendry

Professor Hallstrom's dying gift to his favourite student, the historian Sven Westerberg, was a small casket containing the final writings of the Mediaeval Egyptian scholar, Mohammed el Hassif. In 1393, el Hassif inexplicably committed suicide by taking poison; in a note to Sven Westerberg, Professor Hallstrom explained that the writings went right up to the suicide but that no-one had ever been able to understand them. He had retained his own translation so that Sven Westerberg could approach the task with an open mind. His dying hope was that Westerberg would be able to solve a mystery that had perplexed students of Semitics for centuries.

That evening Sven left Birgitta watching a bleak and pessimistic play on television and went into his room where he unlocked the casket. Inside was one sheet of ivory-white vellum whose edges had browned and curled; the Arabic calligraphy was faded and difficult to decipher. He surrounded himself with several old dictionaries, fitted a magnifying glass to his right eye, and set to work.

Hours later, long after Birgitta had looked in on her way to bed, he leaned back in his chair to survey his translation:

From north, south, east, and west, the outer eye views the inner eye.

The inner eye is mine, then, now, and then again.

The outer eye is yours.

When your outer eye approves, you view from the south.

When your outer eye disapproves, you view from the north.

You are a ruler. You rule my kingdom.

I shall not betray my future. I shall become you.

Sven Westerberg felt a tiny thrill of panic. He had no idea what the words meant. Having memorised them, he went to bed, and finally slept.

He had made no progress with the last words of Mohammed el Hassif by the time he and Birgitta went for their annual summer holiday at their cabin on an island south of Stockholm. None of his colleagues had been able to help. By now the lines had become an obsession. They churned constantly through his mind, as familiar to him as his name.

One morning he was sitting outside the cabin in gloomy sunshine trying to read when suddenly Birgitta ran up playfully and crouched in front of him holding her camera. She took a picture of him and then ran back into the cabin giggling. He didn't mind. She liked taking pictures of people when they were preoccupied. He imagined the lugubrious features that would greet him when she showed him the photograph later. The lugubrious features. The furrowed brow. The bald Swedish eyes staring into the book. Sven Westerberg realised that he was looking at himself. From outside. Through the eyes of the camera. An outer eye. Looking into his eyes. Inner eyes.

Mohammed el Hassif might have been addressing a camera. But he didn't know what a camera was. Sven realised with mounting excitement that this was his first break-through. For the first time he had a real sense of the presence of Mohammed el Hassif. Sven pictured himself sitting in his chair outside the cabin from different camera angles. North. That must be the direction in which he was looking — towards the

woodshed. He imagined himself from other directions. The inner eye is mine, then, now, and then again. Then... something in the past. He watched himself climbing out of bed that morning. In the picture, he was looking towards the chest of drawers in the corner of the bedroom. Assuming that that was north, the camera was positioned south south east. He imagined the moment the previous afternoon when he had sat down beside the lake and looked across. The camera angle was from the south west. He could see himself in pictures from the past.

Then, now, and then again. Then again... something in the future. Having lunch. He imagined the table out on the grass, Birgitta facing him, holding her knife and fork as she scrambled with some unknown food, and he knew that she was talking. She was his north. The camera angle was from the south west again. He could see himself in half-profile from the rear-left.

It seemed to be the case that when he summoned images including himself from the past, the present, or the future, he saw a photograph that contained himself and that he viewed the scenes from a variety of angles. Birgitta came out of the cabin with a jug of home-made lemonade. He decided to try it on her.

— I'm going to name a situation you've been in. A picture will come into your mind. Freeze it. Don't let it move on. Don't let it become populated. Freeze the first still image that comes, OK?

— OK.

— The room you slept in when you were five.

Birgitta closed her eyes and nodded.

— What can you see?

— I can see the room, with its wallpaper and its little bed...

— Are you in the picture?

— I'm in the bed. I'm lying on my back in bed.

— Where are you looking from?

— What?

— Imagine you're looking at a photograph. Where was the camera that took it?

She opened her eyes and stared at him.

— Over the door.

— Over the door!

— Yes.

— Funny isn't it.

— Yes. Somewhere I've never been.

He explained to Birgitta that he thought he was part of the way towards understanding the last words of Mohammed el Hassif. He asked her not to disturb him under any circumstances, and went to his room. He sat at his desk and took out a pencil and notepad. He drew pictures — images of himself from the past and future — and added eyes to show where the camera was. But in every case the camera was looking from the south west or the south east; he was looking over one or the other of his shoulders from various heights. When your outer eye approves, you view from the south. All Sven Westerberg's views were from the south, or thereabouts. When your outer eye disapproves, you view from the north. Disapproves... disapproves of what? Of the picture. Of what is happening in the picture. Something you're guilty about. Immediately there appeared a picture of him and Margaretha. He was lying on his back on her bed. Margaretha was sitting astride his loins. They were looking into each other's eyes. His north was the ceiling beyond Margaretha.

The camera was looking from beside the foot of the bed. That was from the north. Or thereabouts.

Sven Westerberg heaved a sigh and leaned back, tilting his chair so that it rested on two legs. A new question occurred to him: was the camera in the past or the present? Could it take photographs from where the eye couldn't see — from above doors, from behind backs? Or was it part of the act of remembering and envisaging — an extrapolation? He frowned. It must be the latter. The thought that part of his consciousness was hanging around somewhere in the room was too unlikely.

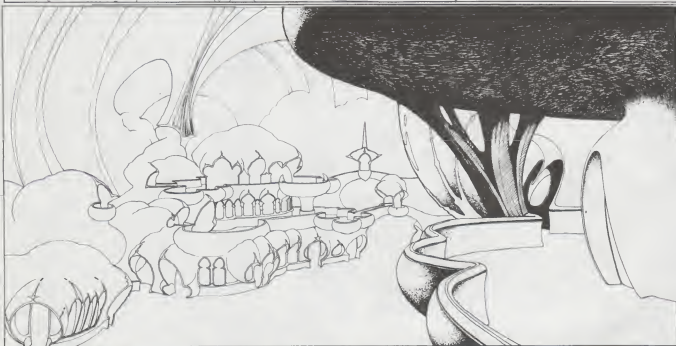
You are a ruler. You rule my kingdom. But Mohammed el Hassif might well have had some reason for believing that the camera — or outer eye — was in the present with him. Like some sort of alter ego, doppelganger, or guardian angel. Whatever I do, thought Sven Westerberg, you are there, watching.

I shall not betray my future. I shall become you. And then Mohammed el Hassif had committed suicide. Sven Westerberg gazed towards the window and was surprised to find that it had grown dark outside. His ghostly reflection stared back. He suddenly saw a picture of himself committing suicide. He was holding a gun to his temple. The camera was looking directly into his face. From due north. Disapproval. Not acceptable. He felt a slight tremor in his stomach. Suppose Mohammed el Hassif had imagined his own suicide and the camera angle had been favourable. Suppose he had dreamed the picture of himself taking poison, and he'd been looking over one of his shoulders. Suppose he'd been looking through his own eyes.

Sven Westerberg now realised why Mohammed el Hassif had taken his own life. He had gone to become whatever it was that on one occasion looked through his own eyes. Unlike most scholars he had been privileged to glimpse an image of himself that was totally acceptable. Suicide was the first authentic act that Mohammed el Hassif had remembered or envisaged. Sven Westerberg pictured himself as he was, sitting at his desk. The camera was behind him and slightly to the left. Or from the south west, as Mohammed el Hassif would have put it. Sven Westerberg was looking at the back of his own head. Instinctively he turned and looked. There was nothing there. But he knew that he would never be alone in a room again.

John Hendry was born in 1943, has a degree in Philosophy and English from Leeds University, and spent a year teaching in Libya "right after Ghaddafi's coup." In 1977-80 he was presenter-producer of the BBC Radio Leeds breakfast news programme — "a job I left because anyone who can sound cheerful at 6.30 every morning must be something of an actor so I got an Equity card and went freelance." He now gives himself time to write by earning a modest income voicing radio and TV ads all over the North of England.

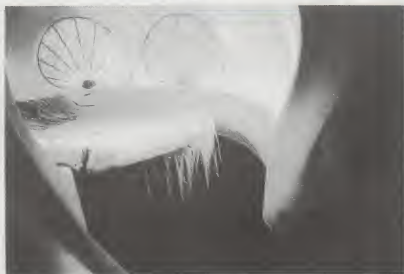
"The Views of Mohammed el Hassif" is his first published story, although the *London Magazine* has accepted a couple of others from him. Recently he has been working on two stories: "The Picture", in which "a group of people compose a line-drawing by telepathy — a jumble by several hands that hangs on the wall and struggles to become organic, with fatal results"; and "The Goliaths", which is "a satire about an invasion by homosexual giants." We look forward to seeing them.

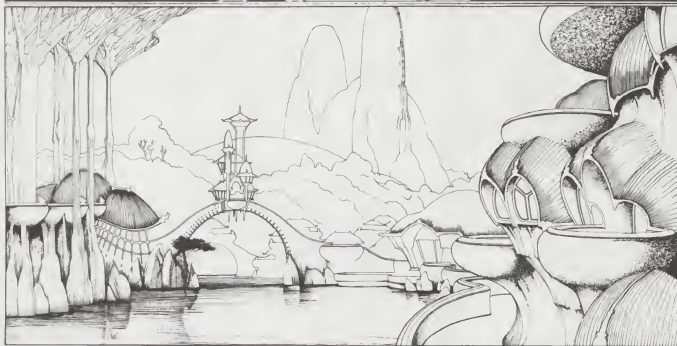
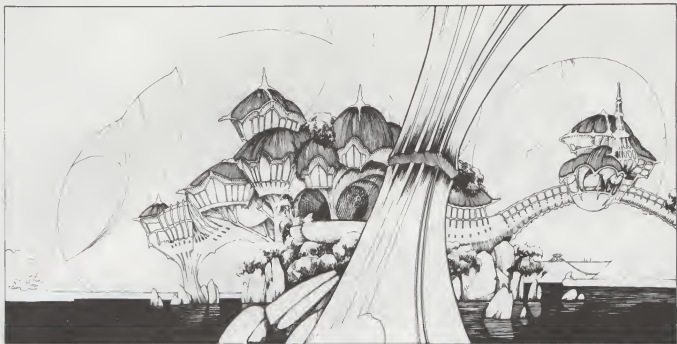


RADICAL ARCHITECTURE

Roger Dean

- 1 view of the pleasure dome with rides
- 2 from the hotel, third floor, looking towards the shopping area
- 3 inside a bedroom





- 4 underground, inside the theme park:
the catering centre
- 5 the holiday village on a lake, with dome and
towers in the background and hotel at right
- 6 inside a bathroom
- 7 children's play area in the park



The room where Roger Dean is working is a hundred years old: on the bookshelves lies a copy of John Pennethorne's *The Geometry and Optics of Ancient Architecture*, 1878. We have a very precise historical and technical language for describing the buildings of the past, but its grammar will not generate what we build for ourselves in the future. For that we are dependent entirely on experience, to tell us what we do and don't want. Some needs are primary, unchanging — the need for security and privacy which makes us build houses at all. We need satisfying contrasts between the warm room and the howling gale outside; between our own space, the space we share, and the space of others. And we need harmony with our environment. Dean sees the imaginative disaster of the tower block as horizontal as well as vertical. "Dozens of high-rises cast a shadow — in every sense — over an area they have no right to impinge on at all."

Somewhere between Pennethorne and Wimpey we have stopped paying attention, to experience and to principles. The wishes and fantasies of children and adults are built into Dean's plans and prototypes; and he has gone back to investigate knowledge as mammalian as the way a rabbit digs its burrow, and as sophisticated as the ancient martial art of fortress-building. He speaks of the geomancy of locating a building in a landscape. Bit by bit, he has been putting the intelligence back into architecture.

Now it is ready. What you see here is the real ideal home exhibition, a holiday village currently planned to mushroom on a chosen site — where, Dean won't say. Rumours place it

as far as Australia, as near as Brighton Marina. With his brother Martyn, Roger Dean has developed a living system which can be adapted in just the ways he has always envisaged, externally to the site, internally to taste. Tiling techniques permit geometric, highly disciplined design approaches to surfaces which are curved, asymmetrical, and continuously changing in plane. The resulting style can be anything from Moorish to mock-Tudor. Surface decoration, says Dean, is not only beautiful but primarily utilitarian. He points to the tabby cat licking a biscuit in the corner.

These pictures have the fantastic qualities of all Dean's work, but they are fantasies in concrete, to be played in at first, during the experimental stage of adjusting houses to inhabitants, but ultimately to be worked in, lived in; they should make you feel good. Now they look unearthly; but that is exactly what they are not. They are radical, and the roots go very deep. They have a stylized grandeur — "Everyone likes to be amazed," he says — but to be successful, for their inhabitants they must quickly attain the comfortable invisibility of a familiar environment. They must be perfectly accommodating.

The shape of homes to come? Dean shakes his head. Even if this village is a complete success, and his systems are adopted for building all over the world, they will never displace the "architectural inertia" of the twentieth century. They will remain an extravagance, a small alternative, a marginal reminder, a thought.

Colin Greenland

ANGELA'S FATHER

L. Hluchan Sintetos

The Baron's plumed guardsmen stand at attention in the courtyard to welcome the two state visitors, who have arrived together. Oddly enough, both Prince Rupert and the representative from Panthia are unaccompanied. Perhaps Prince Rupert's eccentricity accounts for his coming alone, or perhaps — as rumours have it — his impulse to travel came as the result of a domestic quarrel. His flight could not have been entirely spontaneous, for he has said that a cart will be coming, bringing his baggage. The Panthian representative has no aides or servants because, after all, Panthia is not a rich country.

The guardsmen form a phalanx, three men deep and five wide, against a sunny wall. They squirt through their visors, looking stern, but are only anxious not to make any mistakes. Most of them are quite young, barely eighteen, and still thrilled at appearing in all their armour. Shimmering in their chainmail, they are a nest of new-hatched lizards. A steady spring wind is blowing and the flip-snap of their banners is as loud as gunshots.

The Baron should be there to greet the visitors, but he is not. Whispers seep down the staircases, wash through the halls: the Baron is still out hunting, the Baron is ill, the Baron has vanished entirely. Angela's father, bending to hear what is sighed all around him, realises that something must be done, and he himself hurries out to meet the guests. He is a lean, conscientious man who, in his green-gray tunic, moves among the gaily dressed courtiers like a shadow in a fishpond. When he has something important to say, his hands tremble and he speaks in a high, strained voice, fighting for attention. Curiously, the children have never thought to mimic him.

He finds the visitors dismounting and hastens towards them, wishing they both hadn't arrived at the same time. It would have been less awkward to greet each separately, for each will be sensitive to slights in favour of the other. He tugs down the front of his tunic to smooth it and bows deeply. The other two briefly glance at him and then past him, as if expecting

someone else. But doggedly he makes a small welcoming speech, keeping his eyes fixed on a point just between the two men. They dart wary looks at one another during his speech, no doubt to make sure that the rival is not taking this tribute as entirely his own. Angela's father wishes that the Baroness could be there to admire his tact in this situation.

The Panthian representative frowns, perhaps disappointed in not having a clear occasion for offence. He demands, pointlessly, that someone care for his horse, which is even at that moment being led away by a stablehand. With a peevish frown, Prince Rupert says that someone had better prepare accommodations for the pair of royal peacocks, being brought in the cart with the baggage. The two men then exchange cool satisfied stares. The windchimes, hung that morning by the Baroness, clink loudly in the breeze. For weeks, everyone has been saying that there may be a war.

At that moment, the Baroness sweeps into the courtyard, holding her skirts high and revealing her narrow, high-heeled slippers. (In the hearing of Angela's father, she had once said that her arches were so high that the Prime Minister used to bowl cherries across the floor and under them. Angela's father had grown faint with passion but had pretended to hear nothing.) In her presence, Angela's father feels substantial, fleshy with love. He feels as if love makes him fat, almost as fat as the Baron who, though short, is a surfeited round man and sleek as a stuffed shoat on a platter.

The Baroness curtsies low, her skirts billowing around her like a collapsed hot air balloon, and welcomes the foreigners with a courtly set speech that can scarcely be heard above the persistent chink of chainmail and the growing racket of the windchimes. She does not allude to the Baron's absence.

Prince Rupert acknowledges the greeting and then says that he wishes — that afternoon — to have the use of a barouche landau to make a pilgrimage to the

famed hermit, El Patizambo. Angela's father informs the Prince, with a false show of regret, that the ancient eremite is either dead or has taken up residence in the capital. The anxious expression on the Baroness's horsey face does not change, but he believes he sees gratitude in her eyes. The only barouche landau was lent out several months ago to the Baroness's sister, who is presently under siege. A small army would be needed to retrieve it. Another awkward incident has been averted. Without me there would surely be war, he thinks with satisfaction.

The representative of Panthia, jealous of the Prince's imperious manner, now demands to be shown to his apartments which, incidentally must face on the west, a condition required by the Apodictic faith to which he has recently converted. Again, Angela's father must bow and melt back to whisper instructions to the servants, urging them to hurry ahead and switch the appointments in the visitors' suites, to exchange the baskets of fruit, the patriotic displays, the hangings worked in their respective national colours. In a low voice, he tells a pair of pages that the two men must be conveyed to their chambers with an inconspicuous lack of haste. Consider the prospect of the valley from the mezzanine; dawdle for a few educational moments in the portrait gallery. The visitors are led off, the guardsmen disperse, and the curious servants return to work. Only the Baroness and Angela's father remain in the courtyard. The wind tugs at his sleeves and carries to his nose the mixed fragrances of damp earth, narcissus, and the healthy and not unpleasant-smelling stables. An old folksong claims: "My blood went singing through my bones." He knows how that may be.

"I must have the fireworks seen to. I don't believe the set pieces are securely anchored," says the Baroness thoughtfully, pushing her glasses up her nose. Will she extend her hand for him to kiss as she so rarely does? A hand about which to dream, a hand like no other — and yet, remarkably like his own: the fingers long and brittle, the flesh dry. "Dry hands, a dry heart," his wife used to say, quoting a peasant adage. The Baroness turns away and walks purposefully toward a doorway.

He will see to the fireworks. Who else can? What would the Baroness do without him? What would he be without her?

The firework display will please Angela, he thinks, descending a flight of stone steps into the kitchen.

For a moment, he is quite another man, the man he began to be before he was diverted by duty and passion. He pretends that the display has not been ordered for the amusement of the state visitors but is something he himself has arranged to give his daughter pleasure. After all, he was the one who planned the pieces and sent for the foreign crew of pyrotechnic experts. The display is his to dedicate as he wishes. He feels he owes his daughter something for not being a better father. He can seldom think of anything to do for her or say to her. When he is with her, he can only watch her covertly, wondering why she is so thin and shadowy, so nondescript. His wife once said that Angela was like him, with no talent for seeing what was before her nose. His wife, he thinks, does not much like the child. He wishes he could love his daughter as he once must have. Guiltily, he buys her

expensive gifts: a rocking horse that sings, a toy soldier wearing a carpskin suit of mail, a necklace of gold and amber beads. (He'd bought the necklace for the Baroness but had feared to give it to her.)

Here in the kitchen, a boy is turning a spit holding the body of a terrapin. Thin curls of smoke rise from the leathery flesh, and the limp paws dangle inches from the coals. A cook is rolling out crust for a pie that will be filled with live grackles. (Once it was the Baron's idea to have both grackles and salamanders baked in the same pie, but the salamanders squealed like demons, trying to escape the grackles, and the pie burst open in a bloody explosion on the way to the table. It made an appalling impression. Since then, the Baron does not improve on the recipe books.) Briefly and without interest, the cook glances up as Angela's father crosses the room and then goes back to work, grunting as she bears down on her wooden rolling pin.

He climbs another curving flight of stone steps out of the kitchen and into a long hallway intersected with winding passages like moles' burrows. A red-haired girl stands staring at the portraits of the Baron's ancestors. She is the daughter (or perhaps sister, wife, or camp-follower) of one of the pyrotechnic crew. She has no business to be in the hall, but as she is clean and rather handsome — in a wild, slant-eyed way — he can think of no reason to ask her to leave.

As he approaches, she speaks with her back still turned to him and her eyes fixed on a painting of an unattractive woman holding an even less attractive fox (but the fox after all may have been dead) on her lap. "The sixth Baroness," she says in the manner of a museum guide, "great-grandmother to both the present Baron and Baroness who — you doubtless know — are first cousins." She has a slight accent he cannot place — what a crew of gypsies those pyrotechnic people are — which causes her to precede her's with a slight breathed h.

"Yes," he answers, for he did know this, though he'd forgotten it. He can identify the portraits only by reading the plaques below them, something he seldom does, for the people in them died years ago and so mean nothing to him.

"She spoke seven languages, none very well," adds the girl, "and was said to be quite a good archer — for a Baroness."

"Indeed." He wonders if he ought to express admiration for the sixth Baroness's talents or disapproval of the girl's cavalier attitude toward them.

"I myself speak five languages — two perfectly and the others moderately well. I have won several competitions in the French foil. Also, I've studied and mastered the philosophies of my country's six major thinkers, one of whom is so obscure that only I and one other person can be considered expert in his texts."

"Indeed?" he repeats, more coolly now, thinking that he is wasting time listening to this.

She continued. "Surely even here you have heard of Hrahad-yav Huifa? He caused a revolution in philosophy by claiming that theory, and theory alone, had substance and form and that matter was non-substance, a mere abstraction. He proved this in forty-eight necessarily nonsequential steps in his final masterwork, which took the form of an epic poem on our regional flora and fauna. His ultimate act was to destroy him-

self." She paused and for the first time looked unsure of herself. She conscientiously added, "...we believe."

"But don't you know?" he couldn't help asking.

She said stiffly, "There were rumours, which I would not deign to give credence to, that he left the country on a false passport and was seen gambling in a casino."

He bows slightly, not kowwing why, and attempts to move on.

She takes hold of his sleeve. "I am certain he vanished. Matter vanishes, and ideas remain when all else is gone."

"There may be something which remains," he says pontifically, "something that is neither matter nor an idea." He stops, realising that he is thinking of passion and of love. Not for all the rubies in the Baroness's slipper buckles would he say this. He can't even imagine what possessed him to think it. Perhaps the girl put the idea in his head; she may be a witch — she certainly look like one with her high-arched brows and her constellations of moles. He wrenches out of her grasp and strides angrily down the hall.

Until late afternoon, he busies himself with the firework displays, and it is fortunate that he does. A swan collapses and, upon being re-assembled, is discovered to have been intended as an elephant bearing a torch in its trunk. A worker confesses to having confused the nitrate of barya with the chlorate of potassa and subsequently reversed the colours of the Panthian flag. A small rocket goes off accidentally and fizzles down in the courtyard, a few feet from the cart with Prince Rupert's peacocks, which scream like wounded wildcats. Fortunately only the female was slightly singed, and Prince Rupert was nowhere around, being at that time engaged in a discussion of celestial navigation with the Minister of the Exchequer. But at last all of the pieces have been firmly anchored, and all the rockets are labelled and ready. Angela's father, sooty with sulphur and gunpowder, leaves the field. His boots are gilded with the pollen of wildflowers.

Passing once again through the kitchen, he sees the red-haired girl seated next to the hearth, with her skirt pushed up past her flushed knees and its hem dragging in the cold ashes beyond the fire. With a long fork, she is poking the terrapin so that hot fat spurts from it and sizzles in the fire. She's speaking loudly to a cook who is methodically splitting open and disembowelling the mackerel stacked beside him.

"Czenstaak takes that one step further," she is saying. "He contends that god-ness is equally distributed among us. And being so diffused, our divinity gives us absolute power only over the life of one other person — not necessarily someone known, but perhaps a stranger, some poor wretch on the opposite side of the world. We are ignorant of the death we carry with us and yet..." her voice drops hoarsely, "...should we discover our power..." She snaps her fingers.

What nonsense, thinks Angela's father, and he hurries up the stairs out of the kitchen. He crosses a passage and enters the Great Hall, where he finds the Baroness alone, surveying the place settings on the long tables and smoothing napkins and setting forks straight. (How proud she is — how proud they all are — of those bone-handled forks.)

He clears his throat and asks if he may be of service.

She stares at him, for a moment unseeing, and

then her eyes are illuminated by recognition, though still she frowns. (She needs to get her glasses reground, thinks Angela's father fondly.) She sinks and rests on a chair, pressing a silver dish against her cheek as if to cool her face. (It's only silverplate, but it's quite handsome and has a design of grapeleaves around the rim.) "They've been talking war for weeks," she says.

"Yes, indeed," he replies cautiously.

"Prince Rupert and the Panthian representative seem quite ready to go to war with one another, do they not?"

"It is difficult to say."

"They are both our allies. I don't see how we can remain neutral if they declare war on one another."

"That remains to be seen."

She lowers the dish she's been holding. Impressed on her cheek is a faint arc of pink grape leaves. "Do you think that war would be a good thing for us?"

"Well..." He considers his answer carefully, for a state decision may depend on it. "If we win, it might be a good thing."

"Ah, but if we lose?" She stands up suddenly, her hands clasped together at her waist, the cup of her palms turned up.

For a moment he cannot think and then replies in confusion. "Then it might be an ill-advised move."

"Exactly," she sighs. "That is just what I told the Baron."

He modestly inclines his head and finds himself staring down at her hands. Their position lays bare to his sight the inside of her wrists. Dendrical greenish-blue veins run down from the valleys of her elbows, cross under the white bridges of old scar tissue at her wrists, and emerge briefly to vanish in the fat heels of her hands. He believes he can not only see but hear the blood throbbing through them. The sound is like the underwater ticking of a clock. He can almost imagine that her life is concentrated there and that to snap those wrists would be to snap her out of existence. It is all he can do to keep himself from placing his own hands protectively over her wrists. When he looks up, he is even paler than usual.

She tells him, "The Baron hasn't been found yet. They've searched everywhere — the armoury, the chapel, the stables..." Her gaze flickers helplessly over the room as if she hopes the Baron might then emerge from behind the draperies of the dias or the screen of the minstrel's gallery.

"I'm sure he'll appear before dinner. If not, you might have him impersonated as you did last time."

She shakes her head and doesn't reply to this. Instead she says, "One idea did occur to me. We are much too far inland. Perhaps if we overcame and annexed Panthia, we could get more of a sea breeze."

He looks at her encouragingly, hoping her confidences will continue. But she frowns again, straightens her shoulders with a jerk, and leaves the room.

"I'll see what I can do," he calls after her. He doesn't know what he means by this, but he hopes she will find it reassuring. He leaves the hall by another door and turns down the dim corridor that leads to his own apartments. Here the walls are of bare pitted plaster. The Baroness once had them stripped of the hangings, with the intention of having an historical frieze painted on them. The painter was shot while poaching, the restoration funds were used to send the servants (once

again on the verge of uprising) to the circus, and the project was never begun.

He opens the doors to his chambers and finds his wife lying on her stomach before the fire and painting her nails with gold lacquer. She supports herself on her elbows and spreads her fingers like the ribs of a fan, admiring them. It is common knowledge that she is having an affair with the Captain of the Horses, a ten-year-old affair that is as domestic and passionless as most court marriages. She doesn't even look up as her husband passes through to the hallway. Through an open door, he sees Angela in her room, napping with her hands knotted against her chest and her chin pressed down. Most likely, she has been told that she must nap so that she can stay up late for the fireworks. He has the impulse to go in for a moment, but he knows he has nothing to say if she wakes. He goes on to his own room. He removes his sooty jacket, washes himself, and lies down on the bed for a brief rest. Through his open door, he can hear his wife humming "The Fatal Lilac".

He wakes to see the velvety white triangle of his wife's back as she stands before the mirror, arranging a cluster of red cherries in her curls. She pushes in a final pin, arranges a gold gauze scarf round her shoulders, and rustles out. Her perfume lingers behind her, a foreign scent called "Ombre".

He rises and dresses hurriedly, giving no further thought to his wife, for she will as usual be escorted down by her captain. He jabs a finger on one of his medals, and it bleeds a little, but fortunately his uniform is dark. He wishes, as he often has, that he had a sword or even some epaulettes and braid. His medals are all discreetly small and were earned for trivial services: the Star of Fidelity (ten years of service was all that meant), a ribbon for Excellence Beyond Duty (sitting up all night when the Baron's best hunter had her pups), and the Shield of the Order of the Knights of Forestry. He brushes back his hair, a tortoise-backed brush in each hand, and watches himself in the mirror. Until this year, it seemed to him that he was still a young man whose face was showing a few lines of experience; now he realises that he has been middle-aged for some time. He used to think that he was not bad-looking, but no one ever seemed to notice, not even his wife. He wonders if a beard would give him more presence, but he fears it might make him look foolish.

Downstairs in the Great Hall, the Baron is still absent but no one is remarking on it. The Baroness winds in and out among the long tables, welcoming her guests, perhaps hoping that if she stays in motion, it will not be so obvious she is unaccompanied. Angela's father slips into the vacant chair next to Prince Rupert and, acting the part of the tactful host, tries to engage him in a discussion of falconry. The Prince sourly informs him that hawks prey on peacocks and have bounties set on their heads in his country. Falconry is hardly fashionable there; he himself has always found all forms of hunting boring. In fact, after many unprofitable conversational starts, Angela's father concludes that the Prince has found almost everything boring. Prince Rupert does, however, finally admit to an interest in someday going up in an aeroplane.

Across the table, the Panthian representative is

stroking his moustache and covertly checking his reflection in a silver vase. The red-haired girl, whom he addresses as Fiona, sits on his left. There has obviously been a mistake in the seating, but matters have gone too far for Angela's father to call attention to it. He can only hope that nothing unfortunate comes of it. The girl bends her head toward the Panthian representative and speaks in an urgent but inaudible voice. She laughs suddenly, and the laughter — unlike her speaking voice — is wild and too high, as if she were laughing in relief at having escaped a disaster. She shreds the terrapin in small pieces and then wipes her fingers on the tablecloth. Angela's father strains to overhear their conversation but can make out no more than a few words. He sighs and leans back to discuss air flight with Prince Rupert, who is scientifically inclined and has been recently drawing up plans for a dirigible. Angela's father resigns himself to a conversation which is tedious but politic.

The Baroness does not sit but continues to walk among the tables, pausing here and there to speak with her guests and the members of the court. In her hand she carries a goblet of claret, and her face is flushed and her movements awkward. Each time she comes to the table where Angela's father sits, she is careful to address as many sentences to Prince Rupert as to the Panthian representative. Earlier, both men had regarded one another warily, but now the wine has made them relax their guard. Prince Rupert, especially, has grown blurry around his eyes and mouth; and when he smiles at the Baroness, his face reminds Angela's father of a melting wax candle.

Angela's father sits perfectly still, every inch of his skin aware of her sleeve at his ear. He breathes a scent compounded of heliotrope, rice powder, and stale wine, a scent which remains after she has moved away. He follows her passage with his eyes, noticing that she is wearing no shoes under her long skirts. He is sure that the Prime Minister, too, must have glimpsed those narrow, stockinged feet and remembered the cherries. He is so weak with jealousy that he must hold himself erect by pressing his palms against the edge of the table. Prince Rupert's sentences are bubbles that drift toward him and alight, softly popping, on his forehead. How content he might have been if she had never existed, he reflects. This is the first time he has ever regretted his infatuation with her, and he tells himself it's because he isn't used to wine. He usually abstains, but tonight he is nervous, made uneasy by the talk of war. He suddenly has no doubt that the war would destroy them, all of them, even Prince Rupert and the Panthian representative.

Clusters of young boys, ballad singers, stroll desultorily among the guests. They shove one another into the tables, rattling the plates, and seem to have forgotten many of the words to their songs. "And gave my own true love, a rose and a la-da-da," sings one loudly, bolder than the rest. Angela's father recognises several of them as the kitchen staff. As he watches, one boy — believing himself unobserved — steals a pheasant leg off a platter and slips under a tablecloth with it. Most of the guests have pushed aside their plates and are helping themselves unreservedly to the wine. A few are singing, "... a rose and a la-da-da..."

With a clap of her hands, the Baroness announces that the fireworks will begin shortly and suggest that



they all proceed to the piazza. Amiably, the guests rise, still carrying their goblets and going on with their conversations. Someone overturns a wine glass on a lady's brocade skirt, at first she sobs and then begins to laugh. Bumping, jostling, clutching, giggling, singing, the guests surge out of the Great Hall, through a corridor, and out on to the covered terrace. Angela's father sends a reluctant page to wake his daughter and then follows the crowd outside.

Slipping through the aimlessly milling bodies like an eel through a bed of swaying kelp, he emerges at the Baroness's side and surveys the gathering. Drunkenly, the Panthian representative and Prince Rupert share a marble bench, as companionable as two small boys at a birthday party. Ladies and gentlemen lean over the balustrade or embrace in the shadows close to the wall (yes, that is his wife and the Captain of the Horses). He looks for the red-haired girl but fails to spot her. He is delighted to observe the Prime Minister retching into the basin of a potted date palm. At the far end of the piazza, screened by a trough of ferns, a small band strikes up one of the national waltzes — "The Maidens of Firkbenden".

The Baroness waves her handkerchief, and a man on the field puts the torch to one of the magnificent set pieces. The country's flag appears in a blaze of blue and gold, with pinwheels sending out sparks in all directions. On the piazza, the old soldiers stand to attention and salute it. The ladies lay their hands on their hearts or fan themselves briskly, in an excess of emotion. The fireworks continue; two more set pieces

are touched off — the Panthian flag and the coat of arms of Prince Rupert. Rockets whistle into space and explode in brilliant anemones of light. On the artificial lake beyond the field shine phosphorescent patches of Greek fire.

Only Angela's father notices a page sidle up to the Baroness and hears him whisper that the Baron is believed to be in the west tower.

Halfway through the first corridor, Angela's father overtakes the Baroness and is allowed to silently accompany her. Together they continue through the twisting hallways and, pushing aside dusty hangings, enter and cross once-elegant rooms with rococo cornices, rooms whose few ancient furnishings are shrouded against the return of better days, rooms thick with dust and crowded with wooden crates and the guards' cast-off armour. In one gilt-papered suite, he recognises the star maps curling off the walls and a rusting telescope, relics of the year the Baron was passionately keen on astronomy. They go on, up wide staircases, across colonnaded balconies and galleries, up increasingly narrower staircases until they are climbing the narrowest of all, a stone cochlea that leads to the disused west tower room. The Baroness is lighting the way with her pocket torch (a much-loved gift from a visiting British archaeologist), casting a will-o-the-wisp circle of light on the steps ahead of them. Only once does he get a glimpse of her face, when they are passing an arrow slit in the wall and a burst of fireworks bathes them both in silver moon-

shine. The Baroness, more than ever, reminds him of a weary, suspicious horse.

At the very top of the stairs, a wooden door is outlined in yellow light and voices murmur indistinguishable words beyond it. With Angela's father at her shoulder, the Baroness tests the door and sends it creaking open.

The Baron, clad in a stained silk dressing gown, is leaning back against the arm of a sofa that is still draped in muslin. His plump, pyjamaed legs rest on a stack of books that serve as a footstool. A kerosene lamp rests on another stack of books. On the sofa's opposite end, the girl called Fiona sits curled, with her legs tucked under her and her unbound long red hair falling over her dishevelled shift. Both faces stare expressionlessly at the intruders. The girl had been pointing to a line in a book held toward the Baron, but now she lets the book drop and fall shut.

Only Angela's father notices the Baroness draw back slightly and take a sharp breath. In a quite level voice, she says, "We've been searching all over for you."

The Baron, ignoring this, tells her, "I really can't think why I never became interested in philosophy before. It is vastly interesting, you know. Perhaps I did once and I've forgotten. I mean to look through all my diaries to make sure."

Angela's father clears his throat. "You have important guests, the representative of Panthia and Prince Rupert. You must mediate to prevent a war." He speaks apologetically, aware of the indifference of the two people on the sofa. No one seems to be paying any attention.

Closing her eyes, the girl recites a poem in Trevis-tian, a language with which he has some familiarity. He understands it as:

"In the entrails of *sus scrota*
Are found (unknown word) . . .
Omens which close at our approach
Like the pinnate leaves of *mimosa pudica*.
Among our (unknown word again),
These are the most well-imagined . . ."

Muffled explosions of fireworks punctuate her words. Hulfa again, guesses Angela's father. The Baron, who had been nodding while she spoke, now addresses his wife: "You can see how it is. I now perceive that my existence imposes on the universe of the abstract. Any space I occupy dispossesses an abstract concept, perhaps a notion of the Divine Nature or a dilation of Grimm's law. Continued movement on my part is immoral. I should like my meals sent up to me."

Fiona leans forward and touches his cheek with an intimate and approving gesture.

Angela's father feels the Baroness grown tall and taut like a woman on the rack. But still her voice is even. "I must implore you to come below. The situation requires delicacy."

Silver hairs sparkle on the Baron's unshaven jaws. The unhappy appeal in his eyes is meant not for his wife but for the girl beside him. Fiona lays her hand on his knee, and he draws back his shoulders. "I'm sorry," he tells the Baroness, "but I must make restitution. I must erase myself as best I can."

The Baroness gives him a look made up of impatience, anger, and — Angela's father is certain — bitter jealousy. She walks restlessly across the room, yanks open a wooden shutter, and steps out on to an open balcony.

Angela's father, rushing up behind her to prevent her suicide, finds her gripping the balustrade and taking gasping breaths.

"The old fool," she says, not to him. "It will be weeks before he is tired of this nonsense. All those years." She moans this now. "All those years. He believed saffron brought him luck, so I wore it although it made me look jaundiced. When he studied astronomy, I filled my head with constellations: the fox, the dancing sailor, the old woman with the basket of peaches. Now the sky haunts me with phantoms, and he has forgotten all he learned. He looks up and sees. . . only pretty stars. I learned to play billiards, I pored over the mysteries of the steam engine, I took the still-warm bodies of poor grouse and stuffed them full of sawdust and replaced their eyes with glass." Her voice has risen and grown cold. "But I refuse to erase myself any further."

"Indeed not," says Angela's father, not quite comprehending. When the Baroness studied astronomy, he memorised the star charts, too. The old woman with the basket of peaches still touches his heart. He learned how to calculate the angles of impact and recoil of the wooden billiard balls. He drew diagrams of engines, and he passed the tweezers to the Baroness as she inserted the glass eyes. It was all rather interesting, he thought. It was something to do, anyway.

"Very well," says the Baroness furiously staring straight out before her. "If that is what he — and she — wish, let them have it. Let them have meals sent up. It is nothing to me. He is easy to have imitated."

In the open air, the ragged pop-pop of the fireworks is quite loud again. Below, a pink and silver swan is melting into darkness. From this height, the likeness is hard to make out, but Angela's father remembers framing the piece that afternoon. In the intermittent flashes of light from the rockets, the Baroness's face is first turquoise and then lilac. There are tiny lavender bubbles at the corners of her mouth.

Angela's father forgets the Baron, Prince Rupert, the Panthian representative. He is alone with her, and all of the blood in his body seems to surge to his heart, which feels as if it must burst. He drops to his knees and grasps the hem of her skirt. "Let me help you. Tell me what to do. I'd do anything for you. Perhaps I could disguise myself as the Baron. It might be possible if I dyed my hair, stuffed my clothes with straw, wore a long cape. . ."

The Baroness firmly tugs her gown out of his hands and regards him with alarmed curiosity. "What's this chatter of dying your hair?"

"I love you," he cries. "I adore you. I would give my life to serve you."

The Baroness's grey eyes rest on him as if she is really seeing him. "But if you did that, who would take care of the horses?"

It strikes him that she's taken him for the Captain of the Horses, though how this can be when he has been at her side for so many years is something he cannot understand. "The horses are not my concern!"

"They should be," she says severely. "You have your duty to do."

But what is that? He can't remember, isn't sure. She is his duty.

She smoothes her hair, composes her face, and turns back toward the tower doorway. "I must return to my

guests. I have a feeling that war might not be such a bad idea after all." He sees for the last time her long mare's face, blue in the light of the rockets, and then finds himself alone—and invisible—on the balcony.

By herself and rather lonely, Angela rocks on her silent horse beside the window and watches a glittering shower of rain drift down into the lake. Later she is to insist to the amusement of her mother and the Captain of the Horses, that she saw a man fall past, turning over and over in slow brilliant circles like a blazing Catherine's Wheel. No one else saw anything like it.

Lorraine Sintetos is 35 years old and lives in Santa Cruz, California, where she works as a freelance writer of textbooks: "I write mostly for the low grades — English-as-a-second-language, Language Arts, Social Studies. All nonsexist, non-racist, and, we must admit, just a tad jingoist (but I try to keep that in control). In January I bought a word-processing computer for my work and am still on my technological honeymoon. It is the greatest thing that has happened to me since I got an electric typewriter."

She has had stories printed in various US literary magazines, and one of them was reprinted in the anthology *Best American Short Stories, 1978*. In 1982 another of her stories won first prize in a Bay Area women's writing competition. "Angela's Father" is her first piece to appear in a science-fiction or fantasy magazine.

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KITECADET

Keith Roberts

He had been up before first light, as had all the leavemen. Now the long, barrel-vaulted bath house echoed as usual with the shouts and high jinks of his classmates. He stood at the urinal, naked as the rest; the ritual created in him its usual strange sensation, half floating, half exhilarated. Halten, as ever, was noisily displaying his morning excitement to all and sundry. Something warm splashed his ankle; he swore, would perhaps have lashed out, but the other's mouthing was lost suddenly in the huge banging of the steam pipes. The yelps redoubled; he grabbed for soap, the semester's last issue, ran for the shower stalls. He had no intention of being caught for long behind a giggling, shoving queue.

Despite the brightening days, the big stoves in the barrack blocks had been allowed alight; beside each stood a blank-faced Sector servant, fanning warmth up steadily from the glowing grille. He fetched the spare towel hoarded in his locker, and was hailed. "Hey Raoul, after you. . !" He grinned and shook his head, already busy. He was proud of his hair; it was long and thick, the colour of dark corn. He snapped at the Centre man, relaxed, preened himself in warmth.

The breakfast hooter took him by surprise; he was barely halfway through. He hesitated, then drew his hair up quickly into the double ponytail that had recently become the rage. Others, he knew, would do the same; on this morning of mornings, such minor affectations were invariably winked at. It looked well, he decided; nonetheless he felt a vague unease. Almost a guilt. He kept a sharp lookout for the omnipresent Halten. On Feast Days, a certain ebullience was likewise tolerated; it was time, he had decided, for the other to receive a small memento of his displeasure, possibly in the form of a well-blackened eye. But the stocky youth averted his gaze, seemed mightily preoccupied with the texture of the limewashed refectory wall. Which Raoul decided was just possible a point to him.

By zero eight hundred he was through. His uniform, fresh-pressed by the Sector domestics — Base rats they called them, though never to their faces — felt warm and comfortable, his tunic buttons had been polished till they gleamed. He adjusted the new brassard lovingly; the loop of silver cord, worn over the shoulder, that represents the main trace of a Cody rig. In strict truth, he had no right to it as yet; he'd done his training flights, all ten of them, but that had been over the flat fields surrounding Base Camp, well behind the lines. He'd missed out on his first Operational, one of the vicious little fevers that stalk the low ground of the Salient had laid him low; but the T.O. in charge of Cadet messes, in most respects a hard and uncompromising man, had shown an unexpected flash of charity. His term's work had been good; and not all Frontier men go strictly by the book. So when the lists of Cadet Flyers had gone up on the noticeboards his name had been with the rest. He drew the new badge gleefully from Stores, and laughed at Kil Halten's face; because for some reason the other had been pegged.

One duty remained to be performed, before Leave properly began. He flicked a final time at his boots, hefted his duffel and presented himself at the office of Warrantman Keaning. He was kept waiting a considerable while; but that was part of the ritual, and accepted. He stood arms folded, staring out across the Base. The sky was bright now, on that mild spring morning; the early sun gleamed on the low lines of barrack blocks, the taller, gaunt shapes of the Kitehangars. G15, biggest of all the stations on the Salient, would be working for the next few days at much reduced capacity; she would still man four Cody rigs though, round the clock.

The Night Observers (Blackbirds they called them, in Base slang) were coming in; he watched with approval the neat handling of the rigs, lifter after lifter sailing down to be detached by the ground crews, hurried into the safety of the great canvas-sided sheds. He'd

heard that in the low Gs, up round Streanling way, they didn't even draw a string for shiftchange; the Observers simply swapped places in the basket, and up she went again. He curled his lip. They were all bog-happy up there anyway. At G15 each rig was drawn for checking, every time, and a new trace flown. But G15 was the showplace of the frontier; the best station, he thought privately, in the Corps.

The launch vehicles jetted their plumes of steam; and he touched his arm again. Very soon now, he'd be a full-fledged Flier; one of the élite. The thought served to straighten his shoulders fractionally. He was tall, taller by a head than the Salient lads from whom the Corps was mostly staffed; and though Halten had jeered often enough, asking how many extra lifters he'd need for a Force Three Stable, awareness of physical superiority still brought a degree of pleasure.

The opening of the door behind him interrupted the train of thought. He turned, saluted. Warrant Keaning was a grey haired, seamed-faced man; the longest serving of all the Base personnel, if the tale was true. His eyes flicked, from the habit of a lifetime, over the young Cadet's uniform; finally it seemed he was satisfied. He gestured, briefly; Raoul followed him into the inner sanctum, stood stiffly before the desk.

"At ease," said the other mildly. He took from his uniform a pair of curious half-round glasses, adjusted them on his nose. He said, "Ready for the off? You'll have a fine day for it."

Raoul suppressed a smile. Expecting some such comment, he'd taken careful note of the telltales on Hangar Six. "Force Three and a half sir, gusting Four," he said. "Sou-sou west, steady. I'd rather be flying."

"Hmmp," said the other. He spread papers on the desk, studied them. He said, "Seen your family recently?"

"No, sir. Not this term."

"I see. You didn't think of travelling up to Hyeway then?"

Raoul swallowed. The thought of the little Northland farmhouse didn't appeal; his mother clattering in the kitchen baking the dry Maycakes, his father sway-backed from the years he's spent trudging his land, weighed down by the great baskets of grain. "Sower's arse" they called it, and there was no cure. Though they had machine spreaders now for the horse-drawn rigs, there was even talk of investing in an old tractor. A Kitecadet might not earn much, by Middle Land standards; but in the economy of the Salient, the wages he sent home were critical. "I've never been to Middlemarch," he said. "I felt it was too good a chance to miss."

The Warrantman grunted again. "So when will you be thinking of going?"

Raoul opened his mouth, and closed it quickly. The words "First Air Leave" had all but slipped out; but at least he'd avoided the trap. You don't count those sort of chickens, if you're wise; at least not while you're still a Cadet. He said formally, "At the next opportunity, sir." The affair of the brassard rankled with Keaning; he knew; the old man at least was a stickler for regulations. He'd been expecting some sort of grilling; it was a small enough price to pay though.

It seemed the other still had not finished. "I see you were in line for a Church scholarship once," he said. "What made you change your mind?"

Raoul thought quickly. The Corps paperwork he could handle well enough, the trig, met and all the rest; but theology was another matter. The other knew that well enough of course; but he wasn't going to make the admission. Not at least till it was forced out of him. He raised his head. "It was my mother's ambition really," he said. "I didn't feel I had a vocation; I thought I might perhaps be more use here."

Keaning stared over his glasses. "Probably just as well," he said. "They don't give too many of those things out. Not in the Salient at least." So the point was made anyway; but he wasn't a long term Warrantman for nothing. He stared at the papers a final time, and shuffled them together. "Very good," he said. "These seem to be in order." He handed them over. Base Pass and ID, security clearances, the little wallet of credits; exchangeable, Raoul knew, at any counting house of the Church Variant. Or at Main Bank, in Middlemarch. He took them, saluted again smartly. The other removed his glasses, tucked them back in his pocket. "Enjoy your leave, Cadet," he said. "And keep your nose clean, won't you? You know what I mean."

The Warrantman sat for a while after the door had closed, staring into space. He wondered how many boys like that he'd seen come and go now, over the years. He glanced through the long, metal-framed windows at the rigs; bright sails of the lifters steady in the high blue, thin cobweb-lines of traces. He sighed, rubbed his face and busied himself with other tasks.

The transports were waiting, up by Main Gate; most of the other leavemen and Cadets had already clustered round them. Raoul took deep breaths of suddenly wine-sweet air, and resisted the temptation to break into a run. Good enough for a First Year maybe, or one of the Base Rats; but not when you'd got your Trace up. He strode out smartly instead, saluting the Controllers on Three and Four rigs as he passed. Then two pilots soared simultaneously ahead, and he stopped to watch. He'd wondered vaguely why the shiftchange had been delayed; now it became clear. Hangars One and Two were racing, for the benefit of the assembled crowd.

The little kites rose swiftly, dragging their light lines, clawing for altitude; and the singing of the winch gears checked for the addition of the first trace cones. The lifters followed, climbing each to its appointed place as the winches paid out again; in what seemed a startlingly short time the black man-lifters were run out from the hangars. The Observers appeared, goggled and helmeted even on that bright day. The handlers stepped back; and the rigs were climbing once more, steadily, into the blue. He stared up, shading his eyes. The pilots were all but invisible now, mere dots against the glowing sky; and still the lines paid out. The traces angled, steadied; altitude bells pealed faintly from the hangars, and the winches were locked at last. The rigs hung, watchful, over the low hills of the Frontier.

Orderly Meggs was jubilant. "Five fifty two," he said. "Five bloody fifty two, we cracked six minutes. Beat that, for a Force Three launch. . ." The G15 Cadets cheered lustily; the lads from Twelve and Fourteen, who'd be travelling with them, looked more glum. Raoul smiled. It was a smart enough stringup, certainly;

but by the normal standards of the Base, the launchers had been double-manned.

He climbed aboard the first of the gaunt, high-sided vehicles, slung his duffel in the baggage net and hurried for the back. He was long-legged, the seating centres fixed for Salient personnel; he had no intention of suffering the best part of a day of bruised kneecaps. The rest piled after him, with much pushing and shoving; the old hands grabbed the front compartment, set up a card game almost at once. Meggs checked his clipboard, yelling for quiet; and at last they were away, jolting down the rugged track that led to the first of the ramshackle Salient villages. He stared back at the Base, the kite strings tiny already against the eastern sky. He felt again the rise of an intense pleasure. The pleasure was anticipation. Quite what to expect, he had no idea. But he was looking good, his uniform looked good; and this was his first real furlough.

Two hours later, he was feeling bemused. He'd received an impression, his first, of the sheer size of the land the Corps protected. The transports shook and clattered, solid tyres bouncing over potholes; and this was still the Salient, the country he'd known from a child. Dotted with little farms, the occasional small hamlet; broken here and there by the low rise of a hill, but for the most part deadly flat. Little traffic either, and few signs of life; just the odd cart, sometimes a peasant leaning at the wayside, scowling suspiciously at the small convoy. Though once they passed through a slightly bigger settlement; nearly large enough, he supposed, to be called a town. In its centre, placed at the crossing of four roads, were the twin buildings he'd come to expect from his odd trips to the Eastguard; the arrogant, thrusting spire of the Church Variant, fronting the whitewashed barn of the milder Middle Doctrine.

His fellow Cadets had fallen quiet as well. Once Halten, typically, had begun to bawl a vulgar ditty; something about how far you could get up, with a fifty-lifter string. Meggs snarled at him finally to shut up, and Raoul was vaguely glad. There was a sombreness about the place, that matched his altered mood.

A brief stop, at an inn that looked as decrepit as the rest, and the land finally began to change. They were climbing now, into lush green hills. The road surface was better too; the wheels of the transports crunched on new-laid gravel. This country was prosperous, more prosperous than any he'd seen; there were well-stocked fields, neatly fenced paddocks in which fine horses ran. He essayed a question, and Meggs nodded. "Yes," he said. "It's Middlemarch."

They rounded a bend; and Raoul gasped. Ahead lay the biggest house he'd ever seen. It dominated a tree-lined coomb; a high stone frontage, embellished with corner towers, set with line on line of elegant windows. Above it, over the steep-pitched roofs, flew massive kite strings. The streamers flapped, gaudy and graceful; on them he made out the cabalistic signs that protected the Realms from harm. The Seeing Eye, the clenched fist of the Church; and the Vestibule, the ancient leaf-shape that forever distracts the attention of the Evil One. He remembered the shock he had received as a small child, when its use and meaning were first explained to him.

Stev Marden called a question; and once again the Orderly was ready with an answer. "Kitemaster," he

said, and sniffed.

Raoul pondered. Kitemasters were the high churchmen who controlled the Corps itself, shaped its policies, ran each detail of its daily functioning. Always, to him, they'd been semi-legendary beings; now he understood why, if they lived in palaces fit for kings. But his attention was rapidly distracted. Ahead, and closing fast, was a private transport vehicle, one of the very few he had seen. Its sides were blazoned with the insignia of the Church Variant; so it was bound, perhaps, for the great place they had passed. Beyond it was another, and another; soon the road was dotted with them. There were more of the fine buildings too, glimpsed briefly; though none, he thought, as grand as the very first of all.

The hills rose steeper now to either side, coated with heather and gorse. At the highest point of all the rock of which they were formed broke through the grass, showing in weathered outcrops, in rounded domes like the old, patched skulls of giants. A final wheezing climb, and the view ahead abruptly opened out.

Even Halten, it seemed, was momentarily stunned to silence. Far off, the mountains of the Westguard loomed in silhouette, like pale holes knocked in the sky. To right and left, as far as the eye could reach, the land rose to other heights; while below, dwarfed by the vast bowl in which it lay yet still it seemed stretching endlessly, lay Middlemarch, greatest city in all the Realms.

Somebody whooped; and abruptly the spell was broken. The Cadets fell to chattering like magpies as the transports began their slow, cautious descent. Raoul joined in, pointing to this and that wonder; the Middle Lake, the great central parkland where on the morrow the Air Fairs would begin, the pale needle-spires of Godpath, Metropolitan Cathedral of the Variants. The sprawling building beside it, he knew from his books and lectures, was the Corps headquarters; beyond was the Mercy Hospital, the Middle Doctrine's chief establishment. Beyond again loomed other towers, too numerous to count; while in every direction, spreading into distance, were the squares and avenues, the baths and libraries and palaces of that amazing town. To the south Holand, the industrial suburb, spread a faint, polluting haze, but all the rest was sparkling; clear and white, like a place seen in a dream.

The road, the ribbon of gravel, decreased its slope by slow degrees; perspectives became more normal, Middlemarch sank from sight behind the curtain of its own outlying trees. Half an hour later the transports were bowling along a wide boulevard, fringed with fine houses. From each, for this greatest Festival of the year, flew the strings of sacred kites; and the Orderly prodded Raoul in the ribs. "Nice number, that," he said, nodding. "If you ever get tired of the Codys. Kiteman to one of the Masters; you'd be made for life."

The Cadet dragged his mind back from distance. He was bemused, it seemed, by the giddy whirl of traffic. "Yes," he said. "Yes, I suppose I would." He'd been a million miles from the Base; from the stink of dope in the hangars, the scents of oil and steam, harsh roar of the roof arcs on winter nights of wind. But leave the Codys? The thought was insupportable. The great



rigs were his life; they would be his life for ever.

They passed the massive pile of the Cathedral, folk thronging its steps already for the pre-Feast service; and the transports swung right, and right again. Then left, beneath a high stone arch. They drew up in a courtyard, windows staring down all round; and the throbbing of the engines stopped at last. "All right, lads," said Meggs, swinging himself to his feet. "Get your gear together; Reception on the right. . ."

The Hostel was a massive, echoing place; but the room into which he was finally decanted was sufficiently like his old dorm on the Base to make him feel almost at home. The same brown, highly-polished floor; the same identically-spaced beds, each with its blanket cube deposited neatly at the foot; even the same tall, pot-bellied stoves, surrounded by their thin, well-polished rails. He slung his kit down next to Stev Marden, and grinned. "Well," he said, "we made it." Suddenly, the words seemed curiously trite; but the other didn't seem to notice. "At least," he said, "we got rid of that little fucker Halten. I can't wait to get out on the town."

Raoul grinned again. "Me too," he said. "Thank Heaven for small mercies." He started laying out his gear.

Passes were issued; but the curfew was at twenty two hundred. Lights Out twenty two thirty. Stev moaned a little; privately, the other was pleased. The long day, the excitement, had taken more out of him than he'd realized. He was glad to hit the sack; he was asleep almost as soon as his head had touched the pillow.

It seemed he had barely closed his eyes before the reveille hooters were blaring. The Cadets rose, grumbling noisily; but Raoul for one ran to the high windows, stared up anxiously. Light clouds were scudding; but the day was fine.

The Section was herded to Ablutions, then to Early Service. It seemed the chaplain droned on for an age; but at last they were free to leave. A hasty breakfast, an even hastier Dorm Fatigue; and they debouched in threes and fours, onto the city streets.

Middlemarch, that brilliant morning, presented a spectacle Raoul thought he would never forget. The hordes of people, hooting of the flower-decked transporters; here, he decided, must be all the folk in the world. Everywhere, the dark blue of the Corps; and priests in plenty, grey and sage green of the Middle Doctrine, white, black and purple of the Church Variant. Even, here and there, the vivid scarlet of a Master and his aides. There were startling girls too, in robes the like of which he'd never seen. They too had decked themselves with flowers; they passed in chattering, laughing groups, down with all the rest. Toward the park, the great Air Fair.

He'd been separated from Stev and the others; but finding his way presented no difficulty. It seemed he was swept along, as by a tide. Within minutes, he saw the place ahead; the tall stands erected for the visiting dignitaries, the hangars that housed the score on score of show strings. Decorative kite trains already flew, outlining the whole ground with spots of vivid colour.

The proceedings were opened by the Grand Master himself, from a dais higher than all the rest. Raoul wasn't near enough to catch the words; he doubted privately though if anybody heard much. The cheering

was too intense. The Master raised his arms, in a final blessing; and the first of the launch rigs swept onto the field. A gust of vapour whirled above the crowd; the stink of hot oil mingled with the sweetness of crushed grass. Raoul grinned, in pure excitement; and his arm was caught.

He turned. It was a boy a year or two older than himself, a tall lad in the pale blue of a Middlemarch Cadet. He took in the other's uniform, eyes twinkling, glanced at the shoulder tags. "G15," he said. "You're a long way from home. Well, Outlander, have you come to find out how to fly a rig?"

Raoul hesitated; but there was no malice in the words. He grinned again. "I doubt I shall learn very much," he said, and turned back to the field.

Five pilots soared together; within seconds it seemed, their lifters were airborne too. Privately, he was amazed. He'd seen some fast stringing up, but never anything like that. "There's a trick to it of course," said the other. "They strip the fairleads, the cones are ready-spaced."

"We wouldn't have that, not where I come from," growled Raoul. "Cable warp on the drums." But the other laughed outright. "New cables," he said. "They're only used the once. No expense spared, in Middlemarch."

The Fliers worked their tail-down tackles; the strings swung dangerously together, lapped somehow each over each. Three hundred feet above, the baskets all but touched; and from them burst a storm of pink and yellow petals. The crowd roared its delight; and Raoul's new friend grabbed his sleeve again. "That's it for half an hour," he said. "Come on, quick. I've got a pal in the cider tent; get a move on, or we shall never get a drink."

It was the start of a hectic, exhilarating week. There were formal tours of the hangar complexes, a banquet for all the Cadets presided over by no less a personage than Kitemaster Helman himself. By accident or design, G15 drew the top table; the preparatory spitting and polishing went on for most of the day. It promised to be a prickly affair; but by the end of the evening Raoul had all but lost his awe. The old man sat beaming happily, surrounded by Variant children in their new Confirmation robes; later he shook hands, it seemed with everyone in the hall. Meanwhile, the displays went on. Girls in tiny costumes performed feats of aerial daring; Raoul gasped, but only partly at their skill. There was even a demonstration of the new-fangled hydrogen balloons; the city had been buzzing with the news for days. Research had been known to be proceeding, but the Church had hitherto released the slimmest of details. Raoul attended with the rest; he was however curiously unimpressed. The silver blimps rose slowly, above the gaggle of gas bowsters; and he shook his head. They would never replace the elegance and flexibility of the Cods.

The Festival reached its climax. On the final afternoon Canwen, senior Flier of the Salient, was to attempt a new height record. Stev was enthusiastic; but Raoul once more pulled a face. A Cody basket at three thousand feet? There'd be no air to breathe, no air at all. He'd seen the rig designed for the attempt; the traces themselves looked no thicker than a pilot line, even the lifter frames were of some new lightweight alloy. The lifters themselves were massive, twice the span of

anything they had at Base. He brooded. There were Fliers and Fliers of course, but there had only ever been, there would only ever be one Canwen.

The day closed with a massed display. Again, he knew he was seeing something he would probably never see again; fifty rigs, all taking to the air at once. He stared up. The lifter strings glowed oddly bright against the clouds growing overhead; the hissing of the wind through the forest of struts was deep in his skull, like a tinnitus. The crowd roared; and from every basket sort trails and loops of fire, white and scarlet and green. Aerial bombs exploded, a cannonade; as if in answer, the heavens finally opened. He ran, laughing, with the rest. It was for all the world as if the good Lord had deliberately stayed His hand; that was probably Canwen's doing though. "He's always been like it," puffed a fat priest, jogging at his side. "Born in God's arse pocket. . ."

He realized there were two Festivals in Middlemarch; the second was just beginning. Great bands of folk, young men and girls, pranced through the streets regardless of the deluge; every window blazed, the city's many inns and taverns roared. Tonight, it seemed nobody would sleep.

He tacked from pub to pub, drank cup after cup of the rich yellow wine, juice of the miles of orchards for which the Middle Lands were famed. His pockets jingled with cash; but nowhere would they take his money. For a Kiteman, everything was free. He laughed, his arm round the waist of a serving girl. She swung to peck his cheek, her hair brushed at him; he thought it was her scent that made him giddy.

Where he found the other, he could never afterwards remember. Nor could he recall with clarity whether she first spoke to him, or he to her. She was small and neat and rounded, and her skin was brown; he thought he'd never seen so many freckles. She was barefooted, in the short skirt of a serving maid; but that was all to the good. He admired her slim legs, her sturdy little knees. She curled on his lap, feather-light, in a room where a band played jigs, where waitresses circled between the many tables with more decanters of the vivid wine. She reached up, stroked his hair; he bent his head to kiss. "It must be marvellous," she said. "What's it really like? To be a Flier?"

He pulled a face. Much sooner concentrate on rubbing her behind. "It's all right," he said. He nuzzled at her again; but she chuckled, pushed away. "Tell me," she said. "I want to know it all. You must have an awful lot to learn. Who teaches you, the Kitecaptains?"

"No," he said, "they'd never. . ." He stopped. To a Kitecaptain, Cadets were the lowest form of life; but it wouldn't do to admit that. "They're usually pretty busy," he said. "So we have special people. We call them T.O.'s. Training Officers."

She toyed with the brassard on his shoulder. "You've really flown," she said. "Right out across the Frontier. Weren't you very scared?"

He hesitated. He'd have liked to turn the conversation, but there seemed to be no way. "A bit," he said modestly. "But everybody is of course. The first time."

"The first time," she said. "How many times have you done it then?"

"Oh," he said, "a few."

Her eyes were very big and dark. "Are the Badlands really like they say? Do they really shine at night?"

He checked again; but the lie must be maintained now, he'd gone too far to stop. He launched into a description, of a place he'd never seen. He'd heard about it though, often enough; the hills and ridges of that drear expanse, treeless and desolate, stretching as far as the eye could reach, twinkling in darkness with their own blue fire.

"Gosh," she said. "Gosh, you're so brave. I'd never dare. . ." She shivered, deliciously. "And are there people there as well? People like us?"

"There are people," he said. "You don't see much of them as a rule. They're not like us though."

"What. . . are they like?"

He touched the little curl beside her ear. "You wouldn't want to know."

She glanced up quickly. "Have you ever seen a Demon?"

"Ah," he said. "Now that would be telling."

"No, honestly. . ."

He frowned. "No," he said after a moment. "No, I haven't."

"Some of you have though."

"Yes," he said. "I expect some of us have."

She frowned in turn. "I've never understood about them," she said. "What do they look like? Really?"

"You know the Litany."

"Yes," she said. "But it's never seemed to make much sense. I mean, it's difficult to believe in them. All that about fishes, flying in the air. And the flames all coming out. Fish can't fly."

He said, "They made the Badlands though." He smiled. "Don't worry, perhaps there aren't any left. But we've still got to be ready. In case they ever come back."

"What would you do? If you saw one?"

He said easily, "Get rid of it, of course."

She looked at him solemnly. "Would it work?" she said. "Just saying words? What do you call it, exorcising. . . Would it really turn round and fly away?"

He made a face. Once more he seemed to be getting out of his depth. He said, "That's what we're there for." He signalled to one of the waitresses. The girl grabbed the cup from him, drank. Wine trickled on her chin, ran down inside her dress. He said, "Messy thing." He kissed her. The sweetness of the drink was on her mouth.

The street door opened, abruptly. "Oh, no," he said. "Oh no. . ." It seemed he'd been tracked down by his entire Mess. They set up a cheer at the sight of him, and Stev Marden called across. "Save some for me. . ."

They crowded round. Halten was drunker than the rest. He crashed against a table, wine was spilled. A Middlemarcher shouted; Stev said anxiously, "Cool it. . ."

The girl had tensed. Halten grabbed for her wrist. She snatched it back, and Raoul said, "That's enough."

"Enough?" said the other thickly. "Wha' y'mean, enough? Wha's she then, private property?" He pawed at her again; she jumped up, eeled away, and Raoul was on his feet. "I said pack in. . ."

The other's mood changed instantly. "An' who the Hell are you?" he said. "Jus' who the Hell are you?" He snatched at the brassard. "You don't even have the

ri—" He got no further; because Raoul hit him in the mouth.

He was off balance; and the blow had been delivered with all the other's strength. He reeled back, sprawled across four tables. Uproar arose; instantly he was up, arms flailing.

To Raoul, it was as if events were curiously slowed. There was time for regret, even horror, at what he had done; also for fear to grow, because it seemed he was fighting a madman. The air was full of flying fists; his lip split, numbly, a blow on the cheek sent him crashing against the wall. He all but fell; then suddenly the objects round about seemed oddly tinged with red. He launched himself at his opponent, in a berserk rage.

There was no memory, later, of physical contact; and certainly none of pain. He was aware, dimly, of the blows he rained, of the other's contorted face; then it seemed his sight was wholly swamped. He wrestled with the arms that held him back; and Stev's voice reached him faintly. "For God's sake," he said, "you'll bloody kill him. . ."

His vision cleared, abruptly. Halten had rolled onto his side; he lay whimpering, hands to his reddened face. A dozen separate scuffles had already broken out; and the girl was tugging desperately at his arm. "Quick," she said, "quick. Before the Vars get here. . ."

It registered, dimly. He'd seen the Variant police in action once or twice before. He ran with her, half-leaning. He felt giddy now and sick, disoriented. "Come on," she said, "come on. It isn't far. . ."

The street outside was crowded still. They turned and twisted, desperate; and there was an archway, closed off by iron-studded doors. She pushed at a wicket, ducked through, slammed. He saw treegrown grounds, a drive; beyond, lines of tall lit windows. She turned aside though, to a stable block. "Up here," she said, "up here. You'll be all right. . ."

He negotiated, with difficulty, a steep wooden ladder. Round about was a powerful, sweet scent that in his dazed condition he couldn't place. A match flared, in the dark; by the light of the lamp she lit he saw they were in a hayloft. He sat down, shakily. His cheek was stinging now; he put his fingers to it. They came away red. He stared at them, surprised.

"It's all right," she said again. "It isn't much. I'll get some things." She swung quickly down the ladder.

She was back in minutes with a bowl and cloths, a towel. She knelt beside him, wiping gently. She said, "He caught you an awful whack," and he said dully, "I nearly killed him, didn't I?" She paused then in what she was doing. She said, "I wish you had." She finished finally, sat back. "There," she said, "it's not too bad at all. How do you feel?"

"Fine," he said. "I'm all right now, honestly."

She drew her knees up, linked her arms around them. In the dim light, her eyes were unfathomable. He watched back; and suddenly he knew why he was there, what the end of it must be. His heart gave a great leap and bound; like the surge of a Cody basket almost, caught in a squall.

She saw he'd understood; she rose, unhurriedly, undid her frock and let it fall. He thought he'd never seen anything as beautiful. She knelt before him again,

began to work at his tunic. He licked his lips; and when his voice came it was little more than a croak. He said, "What about the others?" and she smiled. "They'll be out all night," she said serenely. "Nobody will come here." She pressed her mouth to his, twined fingers behind his neck. He tasted salt again, and didn't care.

It was over far too quickly, the first time. "Sorry," he said, "I didn't mean. . ." But she merely chuckled. "You should have played with me first," she said. "Don't worry, it'll be better soon." Later, he fell into a deep and dreamless sleep.

She roused him at first light. He was disoriented for a moment; then memory returned. He lay blinking sleepily. He said, "I've been to Heaven," and she smiled. She said, "Where's Heaven?" and he said, "Between your legs." She rolled on to him then, bottom pumping rhythmically, thrusting sweetness at him.

Z ero nine thirty was Departure Time. Walking back through the city, he had leisure to feel scared. He needn't have worried though. Most of the Mess had failed to make the previous night's curfew; they were still staggering in, in bedraggled twos and threes. It was well after ten hundred before they finally got on the road.

Stev greeted him enthusiastically. It seemed he'd had quite a night as well. One eye was decorated in festive green and purple, and there was an angry-looking weal across his forehead. That was nothing though, or so he proclaimed. "You should see Halten, K.," he said. "We really ought to get a picture. Before the swelling goes."

Raoul said nervously, "Is he. . . was he badly hurt?" But the other shook his head. "Take more than that to kill the little bastard," he said. "More's the pity. . ." He nodded at the broken brassard. "Anyway, that's a Charge to start with. If you wanted to make it stick. And we'd all back you. . ."

Raoul was silent, while the transports ground through the city. As they climbed the long road to the hills, he found himself staring back. Middlemarch lay as he had seen it first, basking in mild sunlight; but infinitely, secretly, more lovely now. He touched his tunic pocket, where he'd tucked the trinket she'd given him. In it a scrap of paper, with her name and Postcode; and a tiny curl of hair.

"What's that?" he said. "I'm sorry," and Meggs laughed. "I know what's wrong with him," he said. "He found himself a groupie. What was she, Landy Street? They mostly hang out there. Work in the big houses." He dug Raoul in the ribs. "First one was it, youngster?" He grinned. "Nothing like the first time, eh? Nearly makes me wish I was your age again. . ."

Raoul smiled. For a moment, there'd been a flash of rage; but it was quickly gone. In its place was almost a species of compassion. Because the other had got it so wrong; nobody could know what he'd known, or share. He lay back, felt himself sliding toward sleep; and the transports turned due east, to the high and glowing passes.

He opened his eyes. The city still stretched into haze, the sun still shone; but lacking now in warmth. The land was altered, subtly; the leaves of trees hung still and golden, or stirred uneasy in the

puffs of western wind, harbingers of the first gales. Bad weather, for the Kitemen; soon, winter would be here.

He stared round the transport. No faces he knew, this trip; not a single one. Secretly, he was glad. He'd no desire to chatter; too much was still going on, in his mind.

He checked in at the Hostel. He thought they looked at him a little oddly. He shouldn't be here of course; he should have been in the Northlands. But that was his affair, not theirs.

He walked to Middle Park. The place was deserted, in the early dusk. The stands still stood, skeletally. From one hung tatters of cloth; fragments of banners that had flown there, half a life ago.

The lamplighters were about, when he got back to the town centre; tramping the streets, giving their high, yodelling cries. He tipped one, absently, and found himself a bar. A woman came to him, and smiled. He looked at her, and she went away.

The city quietened, by degrees. At twenty two hundred, he paid up and left. He walked to Landy Street. He found the remembered archway; beyond it, strands of some creeper swayed from the high wall. He tapped the wicket, softly, and it opened. She drew him inside quickly, kissed him with all her body. She said, "I didn't think you'd come. I didn't think I'd ever see you again." He stroked her hair, smelling the fragrance of her. He said, "I promised."

No lights showing, from the big house; the shadows by the stable block were velvet-dark. She took his hand. "Careful," she said. "There's a step there. And another."

She lit the lamp, stared looking at him. The place seemed oddly cold. She said, "You've grown, Raoul." He shook his head. She smiled a little quirky smile. She said, "A bit different from last time." He said, "Yes."

She took his hands. Her eyes were troubled. Dark. She said, "Have you eaten? I could get you something." But he shook his head again. He said, "It's all right."

"Raoul," she said, "what's the matter?"

"Nothing," he said. "It's nothing."

She was still unsure. She stared up again, eyes moving in little shifts and changes of direction. She said, "Do you still want me?" and suddenly his own eyes stung. "You don't know how much," he said. "God, you don't know how much." He clung to her; and she drew him down, into the hay. She said, "Undress me."

He felt self-conscious, walking for the first time in a Flier's stiff red cloak. Stev Marden drew it from him, face carefully expressionless; though as he stooped to lay the thing aside he took the chance to mutter, "Good luck, Raoul."

He stared round the field. He'd been up two hours or more; but he still felt curiously lightheaded. It took a moment for details to sink in. There was the launcher of course with its battered, maroon-painted sides, streaked here and there with rust; beside it stood Warrant Keating, and both Adjutants. A little farther back was Captain Goldensoul himself; hands as ever clasped behind him, feet a little apart on the tarmac of the apron. That was an honour he certainly hadn't expected.

He squared his shoulders consciously, stepped out. Zero eight hundred, on a fine June morning; and the

rig already streamed of course, angled up steady into the blue. He saw they'd flown five lifters; so Halten's jibe had in part come true. Halten himself, pilot-rigger for the day, stared down from the top of the high truck. His face was as inscrutable as the rest.

The Launchmaster nodded curtly. "Your Uptime will be one hour," he said. "You shouldn't have any problems. Wind's Three, gusting Four; stable barometer." Raoul nodded in turn. He said, "Thank you, sir."

The manlifter rocked slightly, restrained still by half a dozen Cadets. He climbed into the creaking wicker basket, checked his pistol, the brevity he carried, checked the angle of the tail gear. He remembered at the last instant to turn, salute the Base Commander. Goldensoul acknowledged, it seemed absently; and the Launchmaster snapped, "Clear rig..."

As ever, there was no sensation of leaving the ground. The briefest of bumps, a lurching of the cradle; and he was rising smoothly, drawn behind the immense string of kites. He stared back, and down. Already, the hangar roofs had changed perspective; the big numbers painted on them showed clear, white against corrugated grey. The group round the launcher had spread out, foreshortened on the grass. The peri fence slid underneath, swayed gently as he gained in altitude; ahead lay the border, the low hills of the Badlands.

At three hundred feet he primed the pistol, slipped the copper cap over the nipple. He checked his harness, the snap-releases that held him to the basket. The rule had only just come in, he'd heard a lot of the older fliers wouldn't use them. He tugged them anyway, conscientiously. Because rules are rules, they're there to be obeyed. And this was his first Op.

The wind was keen already, slicing at him; he was glad of the protection of the leather suit. "The Breath of God" they called it, in those endless early Sermons. On the ground, the words seemed trite; up here though, as ever, they made sense. He marvelled, as he had marvelled before, at the sheer silent power of a Cody rig. He peered up at the string. The trace snaked, gracefully, gave him a glimpse of his first lifter; beyond, the vivid dot that was the pilot. The wind-flaw caught the basket; he lost altitude, worked at the tail-down tackle. The train steadied again.

He guessed he was at operational height. Downstairs the hangar bells would be pealing, the Launchmaster setting the safeties on the big winch. He looked back, to the grey rectangles of sheds. Westward the land stretched into haze. Somewhere beyond the bright horizon lay Middlemarch. He stared straight down. High though he was, the low, humped bushes showed clear; it seemed he could have numbered the individual blades of grass.

There was a ringing snap. The thrill lashed back through the train; instantly the rig began to snake again, more wildly than before. He stared up, appalled. He had lost his pilot.

The Cody was now hopelessly unbalanced. The basket dipped sickeningly, soared; he grabbed for the main trace, felt the vibration of the winch. Below, he knew, binoculars would have been trained; they'd have seen, at the same instant. A lifter boomed and flapped; at once, the line tension eased. Somewhere, a deadly calculation was going on. Too slow, and his lift was gone; too fast, and they'd crack a strut. Then he'd

be done for good.

He glared back at the boundary fence; the long thin line of it, stretching into distance. So near, and yet so far. Then there was time, it seemed, for one strange thought. He remembered Halten's face, the lack of expression there. One slip, a badly-adjusted tackle; but accident or design, it made no difference now. Halten was through. He stared at the fence again, regauged his height. He'd realized he had more pressing problems; he'd just received an aerial lesson in trigonometry.

The basket struck, rebounded. Had it not been for the harness he'd have been thrown out, onto the sick grass of the Badlands. He worked the tail-down tackle; and the wind gusted suddenly. It made him another hundred yards; but the fence looked as far away as ever.

The shouts carried to him. "The basket, the basket. . ." He understood, at last; it was tilted to one side, carrying far too much weight. He grabbed the pistol from its wicker holster, but he was too late; the thing that had boarded him already had his wrist. It was no bigger, perhaps, than a three or four year child, and its skin was an odd, almost translucent blue. It was mature though, evidently; he saw that it was female. Dreadfully, appallingly female.

The gun went off, wildly; then it was jerked from his hand. The basket rebounded again; but the other didn't relax its grip. He stared, in terror. What he saw now in the eyes was not the hate he'd read about, but love; a horrifying, eternal love. She stroked his arm, and gurgled; gurgled and pleaded, even while he took the line axe, and struck, and struck, and struck. . .

He flung the girl away from him. She fell back, panting, in the hay. "Raoul," she said, "what is it? What have I done. . ." He couldn't answer though; he was grabbing for his clothes. He ran, for the tall ladder; and she screamed again. "Raoul, no. . .no, please. . ."

The city was round about him. He ran again, through Landy Street, into Main Drag, past the huge bulk of Godpath. The middle park was ahead; his breath was labouring, lungs burning, but he knew he would never stop now. "I'm sorry," he screamed, to the sky that didn't care. "I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm sorry. . ."

Keith Roberts' earlier story for *Interzone*, "Kitemaster", won the British Science Fiction Association award for the best short fiction of 1982, and has been bought by *Amazing Stories* for republication in America.

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IN REVIEW

The Burning Book by Maggie Gee (Faber, £8.95)

A lower-middle class family in England live through the 20th century. They build their lives as best they can; they grow up and grow together or apart; some of them manage to grow away from the restrictions of their class. To what effect? They all get fried in a nuclear war. This is not an easy novel to read, in several senses. As a story of family life, it's chillingly familiar; Maggie Gee has a sharp and uncompromising eye for the cruelties that families commit on the individuals that make them up. Yet the end of all this cruelty is more unbearable still; the great brutality of Hiroshima is invoked to make these small brutalities seem lovable, something to be saved at all costs from the flames.

As prose itself, *The Burning Book* is not easy either. This is fiction that insists it's being fiction. The author is present throughout, sending messages of doom, talking about "my novel"; her prose is self-conscious, repeating phrases, motifs even a particular rhythm for the ends of sentences. The book is totally compelling, not in spite of, but because of, these writerly mannerisms. Not science fiction, and not mere non-likes polemic, but a terrible realism that cannot be denied recognition. (AF)

Mrs Caliban and Others by Rachel Ingalls (Dent, £2.95)

Accidents happen. Ingalls starts where everything stops. In the overworked and infertile place where marriages go to die, she finds good ground. Three stories, three characters suddenly deprived of love; but not of sense. One moves towards madness, one towards death, one uphill on the narrow and unsafe path towards reconciliation. Ingalls doesn't offer us the dreary satisfaction of watching other people fall apart, or jerk tears on behalf of the undeserving losers. She observes each with a cool, sympathetic intelligence, granting them the dignity of full responsibility for the ways they choose. Each journey is necessary, and meaningful. "The Man Who Was Left Behind" is derelict through a casual disaster, and through the shifts and lapses of filial affection. He has no context in the world; he sits on a park bench with the hobos, dreaming of Mexico, letting go, following the army of Xenophon down to the ocean of history. The narrator of "St George and the Nightclub" takes a desperate holiday on a Greek island full of fake icons, inexplicable winds and tenuous couples, illness, injury, murder. His estranged wife lies in a separate room. Somehow he holds on, gently. "Mrs Caliban" aches in suburbia. Her marriage died of shock: a son killed, a second child miscarried, a husband unfaithful. A six-foot-seven naked reptile man called Larry comes into her kitchen and eats the salad. She falls in love with him. It's only natural. At the beginning and at the end of the story it seems likely that Larry is a hallucination out of loneliness; but in the middle it is very clear that he is real: a beautiful, comic, sad, dangerous alien from inner space. (CC)

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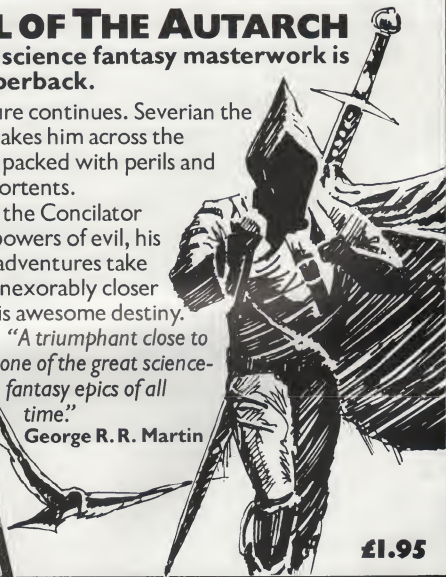
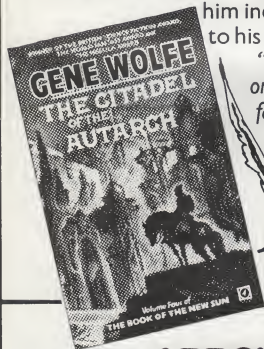
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